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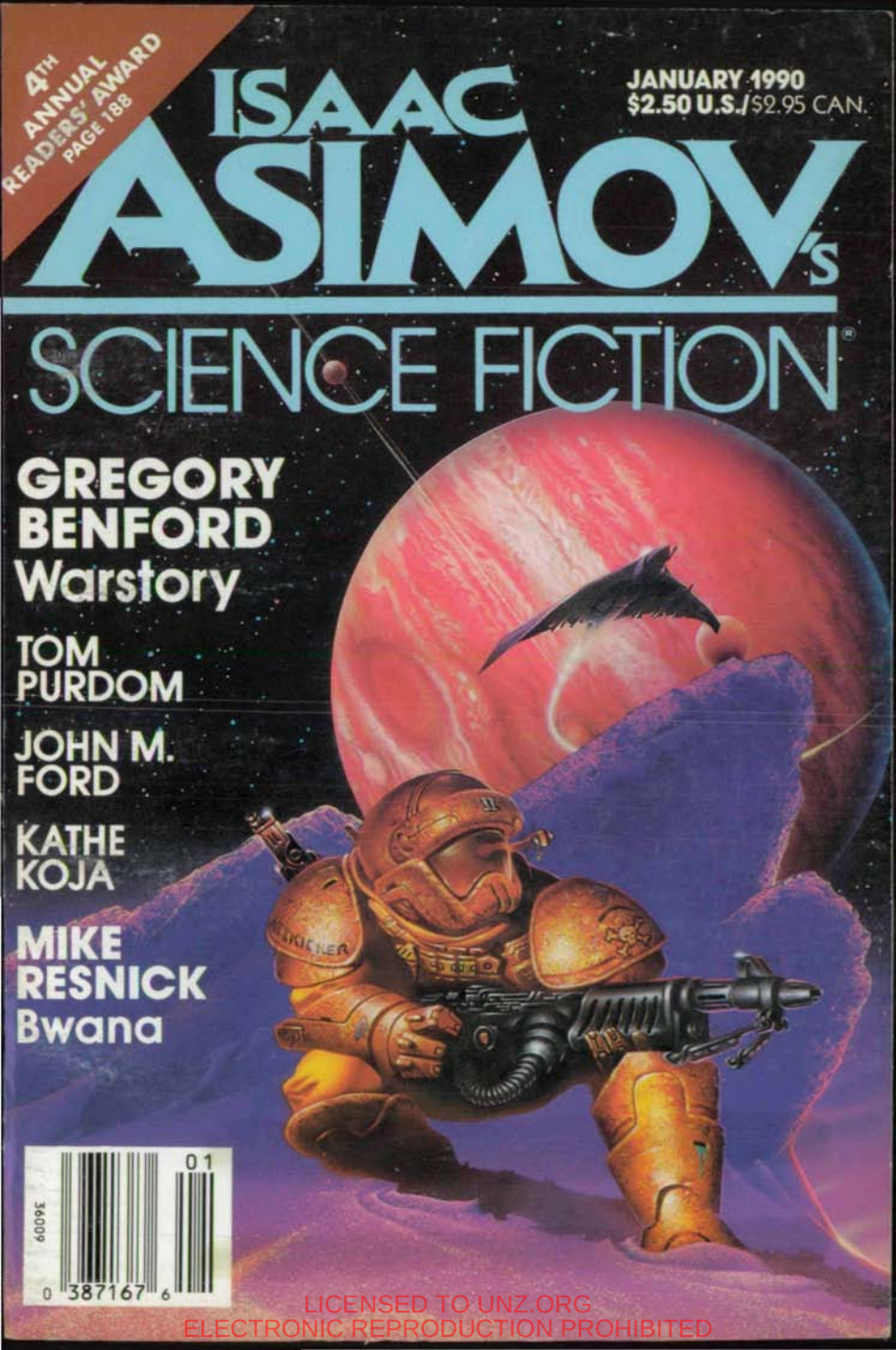

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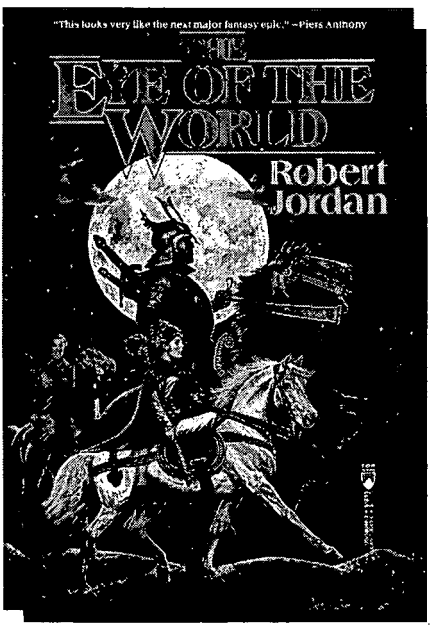

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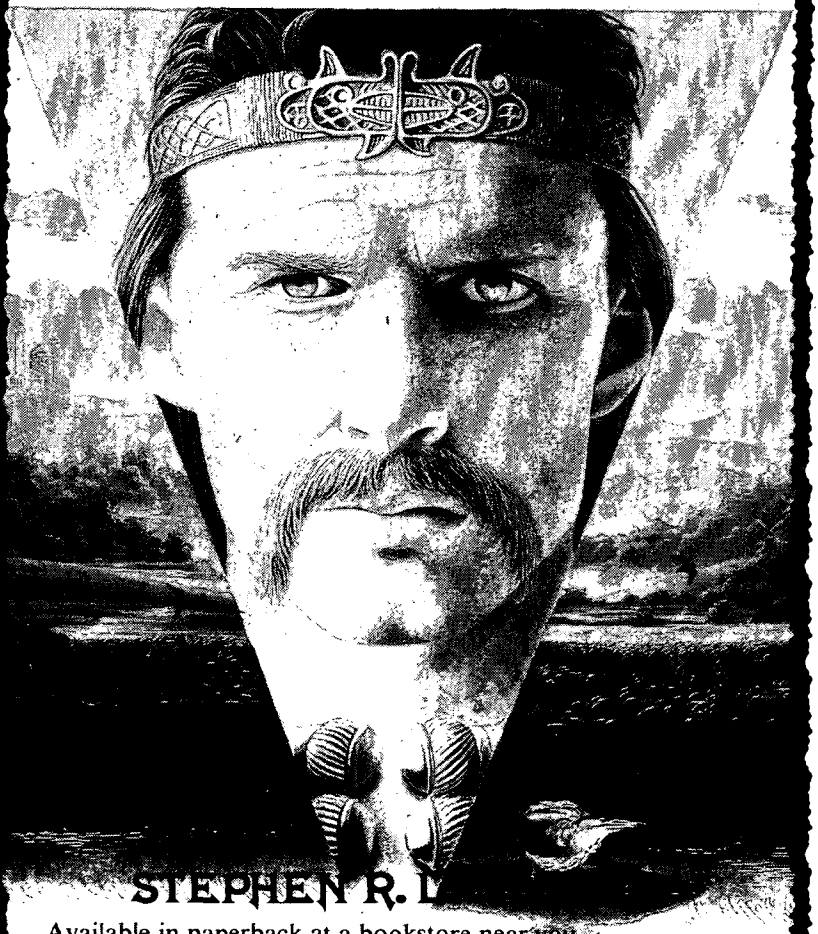

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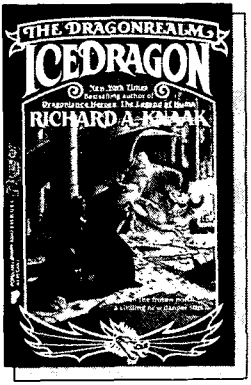

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EDITORIAL

by Isaac Asimov

OPINION II

Back in September 1984, I wrote an editorial entitled "Opinion." Apparently some reader, having grown tired of my editorials, questioned if I actually knew what an editorial was. I replied that an editorial was an essay in which I expressed my opinion on any subject that I thought would, or should, interest my readers.

This I have continued to do ever since, spraying out my opinions on everything under the sun. Naturally, my opinions are controversial. All opinions are controversial, for I'm sure that if I stated it as my opinion that the sun would rise tomorrow morning, someone in Lapland would write to tell me that it was December and the sun would *not* rise tomorrow morning.

And occasionally my opinions arouse anger. At some time or other, for instance, either in an editorial or in an answer to a letter, I expressed an adverse opinion concerning rock-and-roll music.

I received a moderately long letter from a reader whose hurt at my opinion overflowed the page and he told me how well-crafted rock-and-roll lyrics were and how the writers pored over the music to make it brilliant, and so on. I didn't think I ought to argue the point, so I sent back a brief postcard saying: "According to the United States Constitution, you have a right to your opinion. Will it bother you extremely, if I maintain a right to mine."

Apparently, it did, because I got a very haughty letter from him to the effect that since I knew nothing about music, and he (my correspondent) knew a great deal, I had no right to my opinion.

I can only assume that he didn't stop to think about the matter and that he had no idea about the implications of his stand. In the first place, he himself sets the conditions. *He* is satisfied *he* knows more about music than I do and therefore, by the standards *he* sets, he has the right to express his opinions and I have no choice but to accept them. I believe this is called "elitism," but let us go farther.

Since there is undoubtedly someone on Earth who knows more about music than my correspondent, let us go to him, since neither of us has a right to our opinion. Since there may be one person on Earth who knows more about mu-

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sic than anyone else, only that one person has a right to an opinion. Of course, it may be that there can be an argument as to who, on Earth, knows most about music, in which case we have to suspend all judgments whatever, until we work out to whom the sole right of an opinion exists.

Undoubtedly, there are fields in which answers are clearcut and in which people are skilled. Thus, when I felt that my coronary arteries were in trouble, I went to my internist, whom I was satisfied was just about the best in the city; he recommended the best cardiologist he knew; who in turn recommended the best surgeon he knew. I would not have gone to just anyone in the street to ask his opinion of the matter; nor would I have asked the nearest intern to perform the operation.

Nevertheless, after the cardiologist had explained all alternatives and mentioned the various courses of procedure, he asked *me* to choose. He wanted *my* opinion. He had the expertise, but it was my body. I said, "I want a bypass." The surgeon then also gave me a choice. It was the beginning of December. Did I want it right away or would I rather wait till after Christmas–New Year's? He was sure I could hold out till January. I was not. It was my body, and I felt my life was hanging by a thread. "As soon as possible," I said. And the operation was carried out on December 14.

Neither the cardiologist nor the surgeon took the attitude that since

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my medical knowledge was nil, I had no right to an opinion. It was my body, and I had every right to an opinion.

But now there are fields of knowledge in which answers are not as clearcut as they are in surgery or, let us say, architecture, or physics. If an architect assures me that a certain design I would prefer would result in a house that would fall down, I'll take his word for it and won't argue. If a physicist tells me that a certain course of procedure violates the symmetry laws, I'll take his word for it, and won't argue.

However, in such things as economics, or sociology, or politics, or international affairs, there are no clearcut answers. Economists, sociologists, and politicians differ among themselves extremely and there are none we can wholly and blindly trust. There are problems facing us in this world: the deterioration of the environment, the debt load of third-world countries, the drug epidemic that is destroying the United States, the endless fighting in the Middle East; to which no one has answers.

In that case, surely things are up for grabs. The theory of democracy is that if answers are totally uncertain then the best thing we can do is ask *everybody* for his opinion and count noses. Somehow the majority will plump for the best.

I'm not saying they always do. Since World War II, I have seen the American electorate twice choose as their leader someone whom I judged to be untrustworthy, *before* he was elected, and turn down two men who were more honest than he. I have also seen them twice choose as their leader someone whom I judged rather stupid *before* he was elected and turn down two men who were more intelligent than he.

Naturally, I was chagrined and wished I could make the choice all by myself. However, I also know that people who subscribe to the views of my correspondent and who feel that decisions should be made by a very few who "know best" end up with governments and societies far worse than ours. In short, democracy (which gives everyone the right to his or her own opinion) may be a poor way of running a nation, but it is better than all the alternatives in the long run. (In my opinion, of course, and not necessarily in that of my elitist friend.)

But now we come to the matter of artistic judgment. I know nothing about art in any real sense. Nothing. However, a couple of years ago, I spent a rather large sum on a painting for no other reason than that I liked to look at it. I was given my choice of several and pointed and said, "That one" and it turned out to be the most expensive, so that maybe it was the best, but I just liked to look at it. It was not a bad investment because its value has increased since I bought it, but I don't intend to sell it. I just like to look at it.

We are all taught to laugh at someone who says "I don't know

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anything about art, but I know what I like." But why should we? It's my eyes and my inner being. Shall I buy something I hate to look at just because someone else assures me it's a great picture?

Besides, why should I have any regard for anyone who claims he can tell what a great picture is? Vincent Van Gogh did a painting called *Sunflowers,* I believe, that recently sold for $40,000,000. Everybody seemed to think it was worth it. What a wonderful picture! What technique! What genius!

I'm perfectly willing to agree. If I had forty million dollars I might buy it if I liked to look at it forty-million-dollars worth. But what I want to know is why, then, couldn't Van Gogh sell any of his paintings while he was alive? He couldn't get bubkes for them. Was there no art connoisseur in his lifetime to look at *Sunflowers* and say "What a marvelous work of art?" I don't say any of them should have been willing to pay forty million dollars for it, but how is it none were willing to pay a hundred dollars for it?

So, frankly, I am not in the least impressed by people who claim to be able to tell the objective value of any work of art that, in the last analysis, can only appeal to a subjective sense of taste. Sure, if they can convince the public they know something, they can raise the value of any painting so that people who want to spend money on a good investment will buy it, regardless of their personal feelings.

I'm not going to do that. It's my eyes and my insides. I want something I like to look at and that makes me feel good, and if you don't approve of my taste and my opinions, fine! Have your own. I'll let you have yours, if you'll let me have mine.

And that brings me to rock-and-roll music. What do I care if someone who claims he knows a great deal about music marvels over the artistry of the music and the lyrics that I find totally offensive?

Rock-and-roll music I find loud, raucous, and indistinguishable from the noise of a jack-hammer (without the sense of useful purpose that I derive from the jack-hammer's noise).

Rock-and-roll music, apparently, cannot be played without enormous amplification that actually destroys the hearing of those who are involved. What degree of art and technique is worth the destruction of hearing?

When they play rock-and-roll music in Central Park, the amplification is such that we can hear it plainly and maddeningly in our apartment through closed windows (of the most expensive kind). What right have those barbarians to impose their tastes on me because they think that the music isn't any good unless it is sufficiently unbearable?

And so, my dear correspondent, I insist on my right to an opinion even though you know (*you* say) so much more than I do. ●

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LETTERS

Dear Gardner (and Dr. Asimov),

I got home from Norwescon and discovered a letter in your May issue from Gordon Remington. Since the letter began with some brief praise for a story of mine, I was all set to perceive Mr. Remington as a splendid fellow of considerable taste, but unfortunately, the more I read of his letter, the less able I was to do so. I thought perhaps if I gave it a month, I would be less grouchy, and then would perceive Mr. Remington's real acuity.

Alas, this has failed to happen, and so I am now going to chomp on a hand that recently fed me. What disturbs me in Mr. Remington's letter is that I have a peculiar feeling that he does not read stories, per se, at all. At least he doesn't seem to read them as if they were stories. He objects to Orson Scott Card's Alvin Maker series on grounds that Mr. Card has sometimes deliberately ignored the possibility that a change of timeline may prevent someone else's being born.

He adds—and I think this is a good demonstration of his approach to a story—that he "spoiled *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *The Princess Bride* for my friends by pointing out that uniformed and armed Nazis would not have been flying in and out of Cairo in the 1930s and that Australia was unknown to medieval Europeans."

Now, it's possible that Mr. Remington is exaggerating a bit, or even indulging in a fairly incredible piece of fiction. But let's take him at his word—he and his friends found all delight sucked instantly from two fine pieces of whimsy because of such trivia.

Mr. Remington, if you are reading this, let me spoil "The Limit of Vision" for you. I screwed up in the worldbuilding for the planet Randall in a whole lot of ways. Just to cover some biggies: its outer moon's orbit would be unstable at that distance, and thus couldn't possibly be as far away as I made it. The tidal effects on weather can't produce the predictability or regularity I describe. The Reynolds number I worked up to allow flight by the griffins is such that people would rarely get hurt falling from griffin-back—the terminal velocity would insure you'd land more gently than a paratrooper does on Earth—and the added atmospheric CO_2 I used as one of the gases to get the number I wanted was at above the level where people would have needed respirators to sleep. And in any case, the odds of a Pope in the early 2000s having canonized Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Brigham Young—or of Mars being settled by

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"Jeffersonian Marxists"—seem pretty goddam low to me.

So by his rules, I have just proved that Mr. Remington did not enjoy my story. Presumably whatever pleasure he got is gone forever. (Sorry about that, Mr. R. Buy my next book, okay? I promise to be more careful.)

If I thought that letter was an aberration, I'd have shrugged it off, but I'm afraid it was very much in the spirit of too many SF readers. Theodore Sturgeon probably had it right when he pointed out that the "science" in science fiction is science in the older sense of the word—knowing. SF is fiction about knowing things: what happens to people who know them (or who find them out), or what happens because someone else finds them out, or what we might all find out.

That's great. Smart people like to know a lot of stuff. It's fun. And as smart people, we all share the experience that knowing things can have surprising consequences. But SF is not about knowledge itself. It's about what the knowledge does. (Just as an "English professor adultery novel" is not about the adultery, but about what happens to the English professor in the course of the adultery or because of the adultery. And romance novels are not about love, but about how love changes people. And so forth.)

I meet far too many SF fans who seem to be reading the stuff to learn science or learn history. It's not any good for that. You won't learn anything about Egypt in 1936, or for that matter about fistfighting, submarines, Egyptology, or how to drive a truck, from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and you sure as hell shouldn't plan to. What you will learn about is how a decent man reconciles his passion for pure knowledge with his responsibilities to his fellow beings. Some of us are even under the delusion that that's more important.

Similarly, you will learn very little about the social sciences from Dr. Asimov's Foundation books —but a great deal about what the world might be like if there really were a high-precision predictive social science, and in particular how highly intelligent, articulate people would deal with such a world. And I bet the Good Doctor is happier to be a novelist than an economist anyway.

So the many picky facts packed into Mr. Remington's letter are utterly beside the point. Since Orson Scott Card seems to be pretty careful about his research, I suspect he knew most of them anyway. But he wasn't trying to write a history book. He was telling a story. And the question he was after was not, for example, where Andrew Jackson's ancestors came from, but what the spirit of Andrew Jackson did as it was incorporated into the spirit of America. And not even what William Blake might have done in the New World, but how William Blake's vision of existence might help us see what it is to be American more clearly. And so forth.

Recently I ran across the following, in Milan Kundera's *The Art of the Novel*: "The novel's sole raison d'etre is to say what only a novel can say."

Or to elaborate: if you want to pick nits, read history books and

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play Trivial Pursuit. If you want to learn science, take a science course somewhere, or read any number of books by Dr. Asimov. If you want to know what I think about the future of computing, read my column in *Computerworld*.

But if you want to know why any of those things matter, down in the depths of the human heart or out in the street where we all meet each other—then read a novel. By Card, or Asimov, or even me.

And read it like a novel, not like anything else.

Extremely grumpily yours,

John Barnes
Missoula, MT

Very eloquent and very true. I like to think that a person ought not to fly in the face of science out of ignorance and excuse it because "it's only a science fiction story." However, stretching science while indicating you know what you're talking about is permissible. I constantly use faster-than-light travel in my stories because I have to for the sake of the plot, but I honestly believe it to be impossible. However, I am clever enough to explain it so that it sounds *possible and that's enough.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov & Mr. Dozois:

Is it your policy to publish provocative letters in *IAsfm* in order to create discussions in your Letters section? If so, I think you have succeeded in your aim when you published Mr. Gordon L. Remington's letter in the May 1989 issue of the magazine. I don't think I'll be the only reader who responds to Mr. Remington.

In his letter, Mr. Remington makes some valid points regarding the writing of alternate reality stories. However, I believe he spoils his argument by referring to *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *The Princess Bride* in the last paragraph. Up to then, Mr. Remington's comments seemed sensible. A trifle overbearing, perhaps, but valid nonetheless. However, in the second-to-the-last sentence, his tone becomes smugly self-satisfied. Tell me, Mr. Remington, do you go to the movies just to spoil your friends' fun? (Are they still your friends and, if so, do they still allow you to go to the movies with them?)

If I am not mistaken, Spielberg and Lucas created *Raiders of the Lost Ark* as a tribute to the Saturday morning movie serials of the 1930's. Pure Escapism. As for *The Princess Bride*: If Mr. Remington had read the novel *The Princess Bride*, he would have realized that Rob Reiner extracted only the most obvious elements from the book in order to make the movie. The novel itself is much more subtle. It has nothing to do at all with medieval Europe (except as an incidental setting) and is a *satire*. William Goldman's main point of the book was that "Life is Not Fair."

In short, Mr. Remington, I think that you invalidated your arguments when you couldn't refrain from self-congratulation.

Finally, Dr. Asimov and Mr. Dozois, thank you for *IAsfm*. I enjoy receiving a magazine each month that practically guarantees good, thoughtful and thought-provoking writing.

Judy F. Joyner
Wilmington, NC

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I have prepared an annotation of Gulliver's Travels, *which was published and in which I carefully pointed out every last inconsistency and impossibility that Swift perpetrated, and also pointed out over and over that Swift was not writing a scientific textbook but a satire, and that it was one of the greatest satires, if not* the *greatest, ever written. If a person doesn't understand the function of satire, he should read (or view) something else.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

In your editorial, "Plotting," that appeared in the June 1989 issue, you stated that the film *Raiders of the Lost Ark* contained "parts that made no sense at all." Yet you neglected to provide any examples to prove your claim. As an ardent fan of Indiana Jones, I am something of an expert on the subject. As such, I beg to differ with you. When and if you ever provide examples of what you refer to, I will be more than happy to completely refute every one of them.

Scott Jarrett
Lakeland, FL

Well, to begin with, I don't think the Ark of the Covenant exists, and if it did exist, I don't think it would have any supernatural powers. Go ahead and refute.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. A, Mr. D, & Ms. W:

I've been a subscriber almost from Issue 1, I think, so you know I'm an enjoyer, too. Mr Silverberg's "In Another Country" (March '89) was a good tale which, after reading his introduction and the story, made me want to read its inspirer, "Vintage Season," which I somehow must have missed back in 1946. But Bob's story was marred, in my judgment, by three serious technical flaws. I wonder if you'd have forgiven them in a less well known writer, as you did for him. They are: (1) Since it is clear that the story is set in modern times (nuclear weapons are implied to have been around for quite some time, e.g.), it is quite inconceivable that a large meteor could be bearing down on the earth unnoticed until it struck. Astronomers have been tracking all such candidates for some time now and I recall seeing more than one article on the probabilities of such a collision in the future. (2) There is no way, in a modern hotel in a large American city, that the time travelers could have so drastically altered and refurnished their rooms without the changes being noticed by hotel personnel. Maids enter the rooms daily. (3) It seemed clear that the time travelers could only see the past by actually visiting it. Their technology included (as inferred from their conversation) no sort of time telescope through which they could observe past events from their own time. The only way, then, for others of Thimiroi's time to become aware of his plan to bolt with Christine, was for him to have executed it while others present observed. But what would they see? Nothing except that Thimiroi was missing. Someone from their era would then have to trek back and physically shadow Thimiroi day and night in order to know what he'd done,

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where he'd gone. Or at least a great deal of expensive and time-consuming detective work would have to have been done. Implausible.

But what lovely names Bob invented for his characters! Some younger readers must already be planning to name expected children after them. And how my heart ached for Thimiroi and Christine, poor time-crossed lovers. Yum!

Jim Carley
Boulder, CO

It is difficult to write a complex story without having some wrinkles upset what should be an unbroken smoothness. However, this is Bob's baby and I'll leave it to him to argue matters out if he wishes. Incidentally, after the story was published a fairly sizable meteor passed the Earth at little more than the distance of the Moon. The meteor wasn't noticed until after it had moved on.
—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Dozois, Dr. Azimov, and Ms. Williams:

I simply want to take this opportunity to applaud your selection of "In Another Country" as cover story in the March issue. I found it absolutely spectacular. It's rare to find a story of that caliber of late.

I deeply appreciated how Mr. Silverberg focused, not on the technology (or lack of), but on the feelings and motivations and emotional lives of his characters. This is no doubt because he had developed a deep interest in them, a passion for them as real people living in his mind. As a non-fiction writer trying to break into fiction, this concerns me. So many writers today seem to forget what really makes a story. In the science fiction genre, new writers (and some old ones, too) often try to write a story about some intriguing technology or scientific idea. Granted, without these science fiction would not be science fiction, but without people, real flesh and blood people with real honest-to-goodness feelings and human motives and actions, science fiction becomes, well, science. I know that I want too much, but I try hard to create characters in my stories that feel as much as I do, people that my reader can love or hate, people that stand up off that page and wrestle their way into his consciousness. I want my characters to be so real and full and interesting that my reader can forget that he simply read about them and feel that he's actually met them. I know that my skill is meager, but I'll keep trying, pouring my soul into my fictional creations, making them live and love, laugh and cry. I only hope that other young writers will do the same.

Getting off the soap box now,

Samuel Ford
Jacksonville, FL

We all want to make our characters live and wrestle their way into the reader's consciousness. Every writer does his best; but it's just not easy. You mustn't think that the reason some writers fall short in the characterization bit is that they don't bother or they think it's unimportant. You might as well sneer at runners because very few of them manage a four-minute mile. How about tackling something easier, like spelling my name correctly?
—Isaac Asimov

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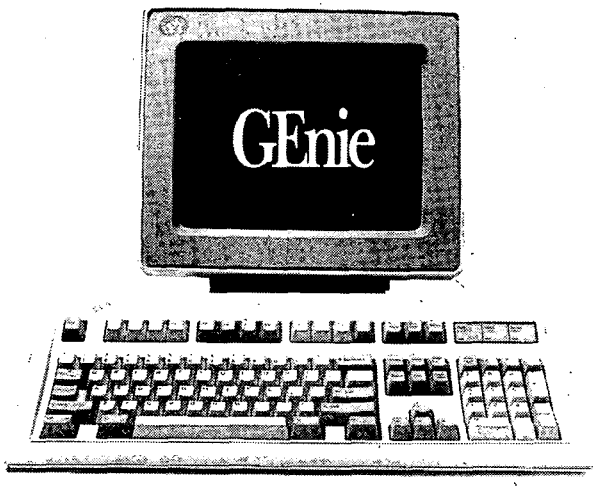

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Dear Dr. Asimov

I have been a faithful subscriber for many years and this is my first letter to you. I would like to congratulate you and your editorial staff for developing a superb platform for showcasing talented writers. Your wonderful magazine has filled many of my evenings and boring airline trips with enjoyable reading.

I also appreciate the candidness of your editorial forum from which you meet all arguments head-on no matter how controversial they are. In the April 1989 issue, you strongly argued that the "good old days" are really not so great after one considers slavery and other supressive actions practiced by the few on the majority during those times. While not opposing your point of view (who can argue for slavery?) and fully realizing that your editorial does not constitute all your views on the subject, I find your argument incomplete. As an engineer and manager, I have trained myself to evaluate the pluses and minuses of many alternate actions before selecting the best (sometimes the least worst) action. If one is to compare our current society with other societies, one has to place a value on all aspects of a civilization. Modern man tends to evaluate only in technical terms: e.g., conveniences, freedoms, science, but there are other considerations in any social order: e.g., community, ecology, population control. Some older societies have a better record in those aspects than our own.

Obviously, we can't go "back" nor does any thinking person really want to. But, in the "good old days" of a few hundred years ago, there were still plenty of rain forests and an abundance of space for mankind and the other "critters" that inhabit this planet. We can learn by looking back because there were "free" societies that lived in nondestructive harmony with nature. The alternative is that our world will become a Trantor, a world of steel, glass, and cement. I think this is what really concerns many who talk about "those good old days."

Respectfully yours,

David J. Bastyr
3407 Livingston
Carrolltown, TX 75007

In the good old days there were fewer people. They did what harm they could and probably wept that they couldn't do more, but they didn't have the numbers and they didn't have the energy available. Why are there five billion of us now? Well, put it up to those who think contraception is a sin.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

I live in the greater Los Angeles/Pasadena metropolitan area and not one public library here carries your magazine (the central Los Angeles library did have it, but they have been closed since an arsonist destroyed a major portion of the library a few years ago). I find it hard to believe that your marketing department does not make an all out campaign to get some of these libraries to carry your magazine. Since Gardner Dozois took over as editor, the stories in your magazine have consistently domi-

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nated the Hugo and Nebula awards and the best-of-the-year anthologies. If I were a librarian I think I would love to have a quality magazine such as yours in my stacks.

Oh, I know what you're going to say: subscribe and save all this frustration. Well, as a matter of fact, I have just started a subscription to your magazine. However, with regret, I am at the same time letting my subscription expire to your sister magazine, *Analog*, a subscription I have had since 1970. I cannot afford to support two subscriptions to magazines that, in all honesty, I do not have the time to read more than superficially. At least with *IAsfm* I know that the few stories I do read will generally be of award-winning quality and I know that I *can* find *Analog* in a few libraries if I want to.

Although I do now have a subscription to *IAsfm*, I urge you to make an aggressive attempt to place your magazine into libraries in order to broaden your audience. Sincerely,

Norman L. Cook
Monrovia, CA

I'll put this up to our business people. Meanwhile, though, you might stress to your own libraries the importance of having good magazines available. I'm upset about the arsonist—another example of the barbarians taking over.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

Reading your recent comment about Mr. John Brunner's use of the French "*hommage*" instead of the English "homage," I was reminded of a conclusion I had come to several years ago—that the en-

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tire French and Latin languages (and possibly German and classical Greek) have been subsumed into English, complete with conjugations and declensions. As an argument for this view, I put forward all the Latin and French words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that I have encountered over the years while reading English-language writing, without so much as a translation, summary, apology, or contextual hint. Every person who has taken an English Lit. class is supposed to know what "*La belle dame sans merci*" means without running off to a French-English dictionary.

While these words are not normally taught as part of the English language, neither are large bodies of what is inarguably English (I include here "SFese" and other specialized usages). Usage is what makes words part of a language, and I would not be surprised to see *any* French or Latin word in an English text in its proper case or declension. Flipping through my Funk and Wagnalls, I see that *tableaux* is the preferred plural for *tableau*—a word that is not labeled as French.

If the above premise is accepted (and even if it isn't), the question should be, "Does the extra 'm' (and italics) in *hommage* add anything that homage lacks?" At least in my case, the answer was "yes": while the name Jarry fired off some absurdist neurons, it was *hommage* that fired off the French neurons and prompted me to look him up in the Britannica.

Which brings up one of the reasons I am an avid SF reader (I use the non-specific SF for its scope: science fiction, speculative fantasy, whatever): I never know what I'll learn around the next page.

Van Lepthien
Grosse Pointe, WA

PS: Yes, I know who Mr. Brunner is, and yes, he does deserve some razzing for *hommage*.

You're probably right and I withdraw my comment. It is the wonder of the English language that it absorbs all other languages. It is what makes it fit to be the nearest thing to a universal language the world has ever seen. (Latin was strictly European.) I once heard my father, who spoke Russian, Yiddish, and Hebrew fluently but was quite primitive in English, speak easily of an "idee fixe," when "fixed idea" would have puzzled him. So you're right. Let English have both.

—Isaac Asimov

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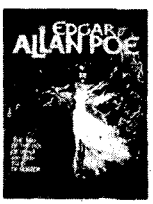

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NEAT STUFF

by Matthew J. Costello

I was interviewing Orson Scott Card for an article on fantasy when the conversation took an unexpected turn. The question was about the future of the field—more dragons and dwarves, or what else?

Card said that he felt that writers will be working with less familiar belief systems—such as the Indian and African mythos. But he also said that contemporary fantasy, what's called "dark fantasy," will grow even stronger. "Stephen King," he said, "made it so popular that it exists as a genre by itself." Card also cited Charles de Lint as someone doing interesting work with contemporary fantasy. "These people are doing contemporary fiction that explores people in the real world. Stephen King's strongest works are about people being empowered in extraordinary ways . . ."

Now, I found this interesting for a couple of reasons. As someone who writes horror, or dark fantasy, I've been feeling assaulted by a new wave of graphic, brutal fiction. A magazine like *Fangoria*, for example, exults in glossy photos of dismemberment and disfigured faces from forgettable slasher flicks.

Clive Barker, with his short story collections, *The Books of Blood*, introduced a nouveau Grand Guignol—literate and powerful. His first outing as a film director, *Hellraiser*, didn't blink from the graphic horror of his vision. And his no-limits approach has been embraced by lesser writers.

Recently, New World Video (1440 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90025) released *Hellbound—Hellraiser II*, which continues Barker's gory saga. The first film was a darkly erotic, brutal film of a magic puzzle box that opens a doorway to hell, summoning the pain-happy Cenobites who serve Leviathan, the Lord of Hell's Labyrinth. In the first film, Julia lures victims back to her house. She kills them, letting their blood revive her dead lover, Frank.

In the course of the grisly film, we get to see the Cenobites performing excruciating experiments in pain-as-pleasure. After seeing people with enlarged fishhooks pulling at their naked bodies, the viewer could only think where else could the film go?

In *Hellbound* the onslaught of brutality continues, but with a marvelously eerie concept. The heroine searches for her imprisoned father in hell. And the tremendous labyrinth of hell is terrifying and overpowering,

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touching our sense of a grand, mythic horror. When the girl wanders through the labyrinth, stumbling onto demented horrors, it brings to mind the eerie black and white classic film, *Carnival of Souls* (1962).

And at the center of this hell floats Leviathan, a tremendous puzzle within the center of the endless maze.

On one hand, I was fascinated with the images, the raw power of Barker's vision of hell as directed by Tony Randel. But the wallowing in pain, blood and grue . . .

Here's Scott Card on Barker: "I think we're in a dead-end there. . . . What Clive Barker is doing is a dead end, going nowhere. After you've grossed us out, it becomes like pornography." There is a place for horror in fantasy, Card says. "The fear and terror that are in exaggerated horror are there in all fantasy. . . . Fear is more interesting than people being cut up."

But this new school has its fans, not just in film and books. Recently Eclipse Comics (PO Box 1099, Forestville, CA 95436) announced *Tapping the Vein,* featuring adaptations of Barker's stories. And Marvel (387 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016), through its Epic line of graphic novels, is planning a series set in the world of *Hellraiser*. The series, according to editor Daniel Chichester, will strive for "film noir horror." The standard EC Comics shock story will be avoided, and the focus of the sixty-four-page graphic anthologies will be stories that extend the mythos.

Key to the stories will be the magic puzzle box, called the Lament Configuration or a Le Marchand Box. It's this intricately carved item that, through history, has opened the doors to hell . . . if someone wanted badly enough to solve the puzzle. The stories will revolve around people playing with this dangerous box, and the hidden world it reveals.

There's something that I hope will come out of this wave of "new" horror. I hope that the authentic power of dark fantasy, the concepts that strike a profound fear and awe in us, will survive the disturbing onslaught, the gleeful wallowing in fake blood, flayed skin, and simulated pain. ●

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WARSTORY

Gregory Benford

Gregory Benford's most recent novel, *Tides of Light*, was published in paperback by Bantam Books last November. A new novel, *Beyond the Fall of Night*, written with Arthur C. Clarke, will be out from Putnam in March. "Warstory," Mr. Benford's latest tale for *IAsfm*, is a tense, fast-paced adventure set on the icy reaches of Ganymede. Portions of this story appeared in *War Years*, an anthology edited by William Fawcett.

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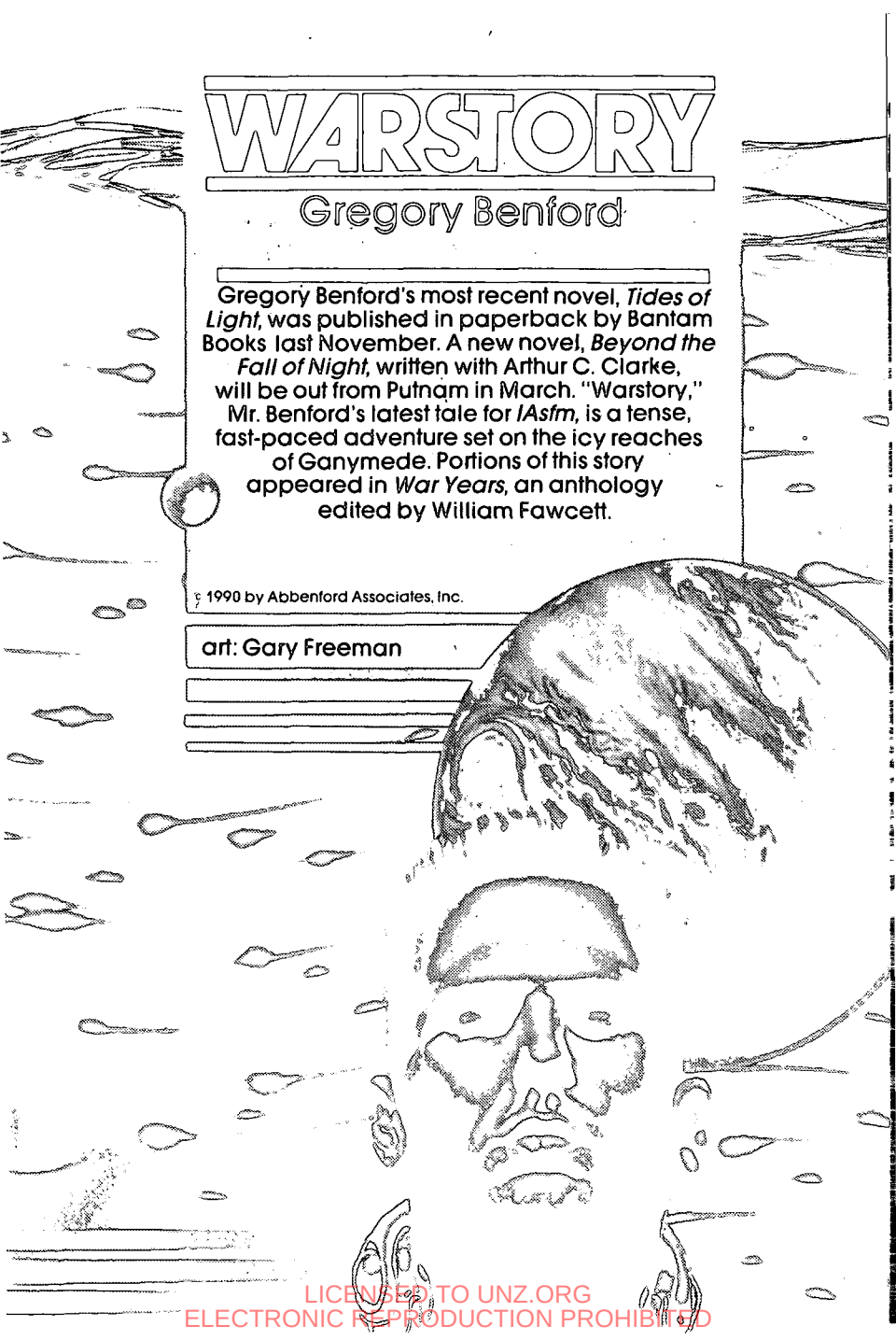

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Russ flexed his four-fingered clamp hands and surveyed the landscape. They were on the nightside of Ganymede. Pale crescents of the other moons sliced the darkness. Jupiter hung like a fat, luminous melon above the distant horizon. He counted three distinct shadows pointing off at angles, each differently colored.

Well, so he'd lost his ship. Worse things could happen. He could be dead.

Co-pilot Columbard already was. They had left her in the wreck, not even able to get the body out. Not that they could have buried it in this damned ice.

"Maybe these'll help us sneak by optical pattern-recog detectors," he said to Zoti, pointing.

"Shadows?" she asked, puffing up a slope even in the light gravity. She carried a big supply pack. "Think so?"

"Could be." He didn't really think so but at this point you had to believe in something.

"Better get away from here," Zoti said.

"Think the Feds got a trace on us?"

She shook her head, a tight movement visible through her skinsuit helmet. "Our guys were giving them plenty deceptors, throwing EM jams on them—the works."

Russ respected her tech talents, but he never relied on tricks alone. Best thing was to get away before some bat came to check the wreck.

"We'll hoof in three minutes," Russ said.

He looked back at the crushed metal can that a big blue-black ice outcropping had made of *Asskicker II*. It didn't look like a fabulously expensive, threatening bomber now, just a pile of scrap. Nye and Kitsov came up the hill, lugging more supplies.

"Got the CCD cubes?" Russ asked Nye.

"Yeah, I yanked them." Nye scowled. He never said much, just let his face do his complaining for him.

"Think they've got good stuff?" Russ asked.

"Some fighter shots," Nye said. "Then a big juicy closeup of the snake that got us."

Russ nodded. Snakes were the thin, silvery missiles that their Northern Hemisphere tech jockeys couldn't knock out. "Well," he said, "maybe that'll be worth something."

Kitsov said, "Worth to Command, could be. To Natwork, no."

Zoti said, "Natwork? Oh—look, *Net*work can't use anything that's classified. A snake shot will have TS all over it."

Russ asked, "TS?"

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Zoti grinned. "They say it means Top Secret, but as far as we're concerned, might as well be Tough Shit. Means we make no loot from it."

Russ nodded. He hated this mercenary shit. If everything had gone right, *Asskicker II* would have lobbed a fusion head smack onto Hiruko Station. Earthside network royalties for the shot would've gone to them all, with Russ getting twice the share of the others, since he was Captain and pilot.

Had that made any difference? You could never really be sure that some subconscious greed hadn't made you rush the orbit a little, shade the numbers, slip just a hair off the mark. Could that be what had let the snake through?

He shook his head. He'd never know, and he wasn't sure he wanted to.

"Still think we'll see a single Yen out of it?" Zoti asked him. He realized she had interpreted his shaking head as disagreement. They would be reading him closely now. The crew wanted reassurance that they weren't doomed and he was the only authority figure around. Never mind that he'd never led a ground operation in his life.

"I think we'll get rich," Russ said, voice full of confidence he had dredged up from somewhere. He wondered if it rang hollowly but the others seemed to brighten.

"Is good!" Kitsov said, grinning.

"It'll be better if we get out of here," Russ said. "Come on."

"Which way?" Nye asked.

"Through that notch in the hills there." Russ pointed.

Nye frowned, black eyebrows meeting above his blunt nose. "What's that way?"

"More important, what *isn't* that way," Russ said. "We'll be putting distance between us and Hiruko Station."

Nye's forehead wrinkled. "You sure?"

"We don't have any nav gear running. I had to sight on the moons." Russ said this confidently but in fact he hadn't done a square, naked eye sighting since tech school.

Zoti said tentatively, "How about a compass?"

"On ice moon?" Kitsov chuckled. "Which way is magnetic pointing?"

"That's the problem," Russ said. "Let's go."

They moved well in the low gravity. None were athletes but they had kept in shape in the gym on the voyage out. There wasn't much else to do on the big carriers. Columbard had said that Zoti got all her workout in the sack, but then Columbard had always been catty. And not a great enthusiast in the sack herself, either. Not that her opinion mattered much, Russ thought, since she wasn't around any more to express it.

A storm came sweeping in on them as they climbed away from the

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wreck. It was more like a sigh of snowflakes, barely buoyant in the thin, deadly methane air. It chilled them further and he wondered if they would all get colds despite the extra insulation they all wore over their combat skinsuits.

Probably. Already his feet tingled. He turned so that his bulky pack sheltered him from the wind. They'd all get frostbite within a couple of days, he guessed.

If they could survive at all. A man in a normal pressure suit could live about an hour on Ganymede. The unending sleet of high energy protons would fry him, ripping through delicate cells and spreading red destruction. This was a natural side effect of Jupiter's hugeness—its compressed core of metallic hydrogen spun rapidly, generating powerful magnetic fields that whipped around every ten hours. These fields are like a rubbery cage, snagging and trapping protons spat out by the sun. Io, the innermost large moon, belched ions of sulfur and sodium into the magnetic traps, adding to the sleet. All this rained down on the inner moons, sputtering the ice.

Damn it, he was a sky jock, not a grunt. He'd never led a crew of barracks rats on a mud mission.

He kept his mind off his bulky pack and chilled feet by guessing what the Feds were doing. The war was moving fast, maybe fast enough to let a downed bomber crew slip through the Fed patrols.

When Northern Hemisphere crews had held Hiruko Station, they'd needed to work outside, supervising robot icediggers. The first inhabitants of Ganymede instead used the newest technology to fend off the proton hail: superconducting suits. Discovery of a way to make cheap superconducting threads made it possible to weave them into pressure suits. The currents running in the threads made a magnetic field outside the suit, where it brushed away incoming protons. Inside, by the laws of magnetostatics, there was no field at all to disturb instrumentation. Once started, the currents flowed forever, without electrical resistance.

He hoped their suits were working right. *Asskicker II*'s strong magnetics had kept them from frying before, but a suit could malf and you'd never know it. He fretted about a dozen other elements in a rapidly growing list of potentially deadly effects.

Already he had new respect for the first Hiruko crews. They'd been damn good at working in this bitter cold, pioneering against the sting and bite of the giant planet. They had carved ice and even started an atmosphere. What they hadn't been so good at was defending themselves.

No reason they should've been, of course. The Southern Hemisphere had seen their chance and had come in hard, total surprise. In a single day they had taken all Ganymede. And killed nearly every Northerner.

The bedraggled surviving crew of *Asskicker II* marched in an eerie dim

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glow from Jupiter. Over half of Ganymede's mass was water-ice, with liberal dollops of carbon dioxide ice, frozen ammonia and methane, and minor traces of other frozen-out gases. Its small rocky core was buried under a thousand-kilometer-deep ocean of water and slush. The crust was liberally sprinkled by billions of years of infalling meteors. These meteorites had peppered the landscape but the atmosphere building project had already smoothed the edges of even recent craters. Ancient impact debris had left hills of metal and rock, the only relief from a flat, barren plain.

This frigid moon had been tugged by Jupiter's tides for so long that it was locked, like Luna, with one face always peering at the banded ruddy planet. One complete day-night cycle was slightly more than an Earth week long. Adjusting to this rhythm would have been difficult if the sun had provided clear punctuation to the three-and-a-half-day nights. But even without an atmosphere, the sun seen from Ganymede was a dim twenty-seventh as bright as at Earth's orbit.

They saw sunup as they crested a line of rumpled hills. The sun was bright but curiously small. Sometimes Russ hardly noticed it, compared to Europa's white, cracked crescent. Jupiter's shrouded mass flickered with orange lightning strokes between the roiling somber clouds.

Ganymede's slow rotation had been enough to churn its inner ocean, exerting a torque on the ice sheets above. Slow-motion tectonics had operated for billions of years, rubbing slabs against each other, grooving and terracing terrain. They leaped over long, strangely straight canyons, rather than try to find ways around. Kitsov proved the best distance man, remorselessly devouring kilometers. Russ watched the sky anxiously. Nothing cut the blackness above except occasional scruffy gray clouds.

They didn't stop for half a day. While they ate he ran an inventory on air, water, food. If their processors worked, recycling from the skinsuits, they could last nearly a week.

"How much food you got?" Nye wanted to know while Russ was figuring.

"I'm not carrying any," Russ answered levelly.

"Huh?" Like most cynics, Nye was also a little slow.

"I'm carrying the warhead."

"What!" Nye actually got to his feet, as though outraged.

"Regs, Sergeant," Russ said slowly. "Never leave a fusion head for the enemy."

"We got to survive out here! We can't be—"

"We are," Russ said. "That's an order."

Nye's mouth worked silently. After a while he sat back down, looking irritated and sheepish at the same time.

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Russ could almost sympathize with him, perhaps because he had more imagination. He knew what lay ahead.

Even if no patrol craft spotted them, they couldn't count on their carrier to send a pickup ship. The battle throughout the inner Jovian system was still going on—he had seen the flashes overhead, far out among the moons. The Northern Hemisphere forces had their hands full.

He looked down at his own hands—four clamp-fingers with delicate tools embedded in the tip of each. Combat pilot hands, technological marvels. Back on the cruiser they could detach these ceramo-wonders and his normal hands would work just fine.

But out here, in bitter cold and sucking vacuum, he couldn't get them off. And the chill seeping into them sent a dull ache up his arms.

The pain he could take. The clumsiness might be fatal.

"Get up!" he called. "Got klicks to go before we sleep, guys."

2

They spotted the autotruck the next day at noon.

It came grinding along beside a gouged trench. The trench looked manmade but it was a stretch mark. Ganymede's natural radioactive elements in its core had heated the dark inner ocean, cracking the ice shell.

But the strip beside the natural groove was a route the automated truck used to haul mined ores.

Or so Russ figured. He did know that already, after just over a day of hard marching, his crew was wearing out fast. Zoti was limping. Maybe she *had* spent her gym time on her back. He didn't give a damn one way or the other but if she slowed them down they might have to leave her behind.

But the truck could change all that. He stopped, dead still, and watched it lumber along. Its treads bit into the pale blue ice and its forward sensors monotonously swept back and forth, watching for obstructions.

Russ was no infantry officer. He knew virtually nothing about flanking and fire-and-maneuver and all the other terms that raced through his head and straight out again, leaving no residue of useful memory.

Had the Feds put fighting machines in the trucks? The idea suddenly occurred to him and seemed utterly logical. He could remember nothing in the flight briefing about that. Mostly because the briefing officer expected them to either come back intact or be blown to frags. Nobody much thought fighter-bombers would crash. Or have surviving crew.

Could the truck hear his suit comm? He didn't know.

Better use hand signals, then. He held up a claw-hand. Nye kept walking until Kitsov grabbed his arm. They all stood for a long moment,

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looking at the orange-colored truck and then at Russ and then back at the truck again.

One thing was sure, Russ thought. If the truck was carrying a fighting machine, the fighter wasn't so hot. His crew made beautiful targets out here, standing out nice and clean against the dirty ice.

He waved with both arms. *Drop your packs.*

Somewhat to his surprise, they did. He was glad to get the bulk off his shoulders.

The truck kept lumbering along, oblivious. He made broad gestures. *Pincer attack.*

They closed the distance at a dead run. The truck didn't slow or turn.

They all leaped the deep groove in the ice with no trouble. They cleared the next forty meters quickly and Nye had reached the truck when a small popping sound came from the truck rear and Kitsov fell.

Russ was headed for the hatch in the front so he couldn't see the rear of the truck at all. The popping came again and Nye fired his M18 at something, the whole clip at once, *rrrrrrrttt!*

The popping stopped. Russ ran alongside the truck, puffing, Zoti beside him. Nye had the back of the truck open. Something came out, something all pipes and servos and rippled aluminum. Damaged but still active. Zoti brought up her M18. Nye hit the thing with the butt of his M18 and caved in an optical sensor. The fighter didn't stop. It reached for Nye with a knife that suddenly flipped up, standing straight out at the end of a telescoping arm. Zoti smashed the arm. The fighting machine tumbled out and went face down on the ice. Russ shot it in the back of its power panel. It didn't move any more.

"Damn!" Nye said. "Had a switchblade! You ever—"

"Get in front!" Russ yelled, turning away.

"What? I—"

"It's still armed," Russ called, already running. If Nye didn't want to follow orders that was fine with him.

They had all nearly reached the front of the truck when the fighter went off, a small *crump.* Shrapnel rattled against the truck.

"Think it's dead now?" Zoti asked, wide-eyed.

"Leave it," Russ said. He walked to where Kitsov lay face down.

The man had a big hole in his chest and a bigger one in back. It was turning reddish brown already. The thin atmosphere was sucking blood out of the body, the stain spreading down the back and onto the mottled ice. It made a pool there which fumed into a brown vapor. He looked at it, his mind motionless for a long moment as he recalled Kitsov once saying some dumb reg made his blood boil. Well, now it was. Clichés had a way of coming true out here.

Russ knew that even the skimpy gear on *Asskicker II* could have kept

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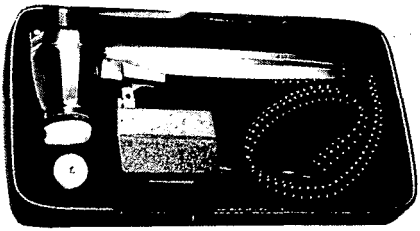

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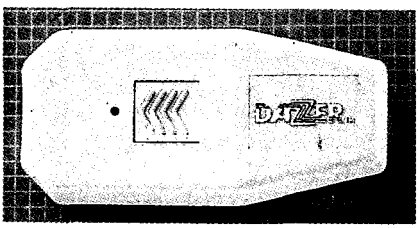

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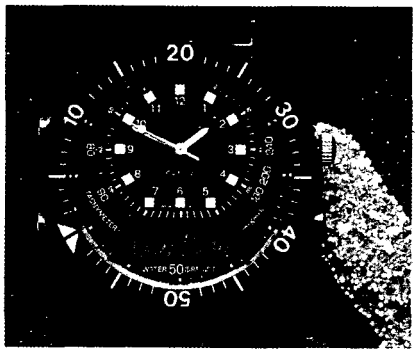

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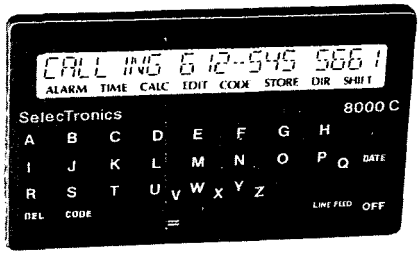

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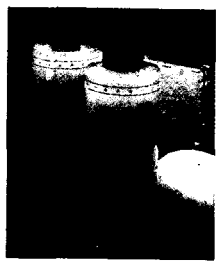

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Kitsov running long enough to get back to the cruiser. Out here there was utterly no hope.

Two days, two crew. Three remaining.

And they had maybe six days of air left. Plenty of time to get their dying done.

3

They got the truck started again. Its autosystems had stopped at the command of the fighting machine. Apparently the machine didn't send out an alarm, though, so they probably had some time to warm up inside.

He checked the general direction the truck was heading and then let himself relax. They were all exhausted.

"Nye, you're first watch," he said.

"Damn, Cap'n, I can hardly—"

"We're all that way. Just watch the board and look out the front port. I'll relieve you in two hours."

Zoti had already dozed off, sprawled on the deck.

He laid down beside her. Two hours would do more for him if he used the syntha-narrative. He plugged it in and selected a storyline. No porno, no. Something as far from this war as he could get, though. It would give him the combined benefits of subconscious combing and action-displacement.

He settled back and felt the soft buzz of electro-input. First, music. Then a slow, gentle edging into another life, another world . . .

The phone barked her awake. Tina liked the Labrador's warm woofing but her mate did not. She slapped the kill switch and cupped the receiver to her ear, then stumbled in darkness into the bathroom.

It was Alvarez from Orange County Emergency Management. The news was worse than anything she had expected: a break in the Huntington Beach dike.

"I'll send a chopper," Alvarez said in her ear, his tinny voice tight with tension.

"Don't bother—use your choppers to evacuate people. How far is the Metro running from Laguna?"

"To the stop by the river. Traffic's pilin' up there."

She leaned forward in the predawn gloom, letting her forehead press against the cool tile of the bathroom, allowing herself ten seconds of rest.

In four minutes she was walking swiftly toward the bus stop near her apartment in Aliso Viejo. Her hand comm said the next bus was

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due in two minutes and here it came, early, headlights spiking through the pre-dawn murk.

On the short run into Laguna Beach Tina called the County Overview officer and got the details. The dike had broken badly and the sea was rushing inland, driving thousands before it. Three dead already and calls coming in so fast Operations couldn't even log them.

Tina yanked open a window and looked at the sky. Cloudless. A lucky break—the storm with its high winds had blown through. Had the tail end of it broken the dike?

She sensed flowing by outside the last long strip of natural greenery in the county—the hushed, moist presence of Laguna Canyon. Then Laguna's neon consumer gumbo engulfed the bus and she got off at the station. Walking to Pacific Coast Highway calmed her jittery nerves. As chief structural engineer she had to find out what broke the dike, whether the trouble was a fluke. A thousand lawsuits would ride on the details.

The Metro came exactly on time, humming on its silvery rails. Tina watched the thin crescent of Main Beach vanish behind in the gathering glow of dawn as she called up more details from OC Operations on her comm. The Metro shot north on Pacific Coast Highway in its segregated lane, purring up to high speed. They passed the elite warrens bristling with guard stations. The Metro overtook a twencen car, a big job from the '70s with the aerodynamics of a brick. It sluggishly got out of the way. A bumper sticker underlined its splendid chrome extravagance, proclaiming THINK OF THIS AS A KIND OF PROTEST. It trailed greasy smoke.

Heavy traffic buzzed over the helipad at Newport. Cars came fleeing south, horns honking. The Metro slowed as it neared the overpass of the Santa Ana River. Helicopters swooped over a jam up ahead. They blared down orders to the milling crowd that seemed to want to stay, to watch the show.

Tina got off the Metro and walked down the light rail line. People were moving aimlessly, frightened, some stunned and wet.

The dike began here, ramparts rising toward the north as the land fell. Surf burst against the outer wall as she climbed up onto the top walk. She could see all the way to Palos Verdes as daybreak set high clouds afire with orange. A kilometer north the smooth curve of the dike abruptly stopped. She watched ocean currents feeding the break, eagerly exploiting this latest tactical victory in a vast war.

A hovercraft sped toward her along the segmented concrete top of the dike. Alvarez, Tina realized; the man had simply traced the

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Metro. Alvarez's dark face, split by a grin, called "Ready for some detective work?" as Tina got aboard.

"I need a good look before the block-droppers get here," Tina said. Alvarez nodded. The hovercraft spun neatly about and accelerated.

The ocean had already chewed away a lot of pre-stressed concrete. Currents frothed over gray chunks and twisted steel that jutted up like broken teeth.

"A whole segment gave way," Tina said tightly.

"Yeah, not just a crack. Somethin' big happened."

Something deep and serious, she thought. This was the first major break in a chain that ran all the way to Santa Barbara. If there was a fundamental flaw they'd overlooked . . .

Tina clambered down the landward slope of the dike, studying the stubby wreckage, measuring with a practiced eye the vectors and forces that should have held. The sea murmured and ran greedily, the tide rising like an appetite. There were no obvious clues; currents had already erased most evidence. A thin scum clung to the broken slabs and Tina slipped on it.

"Hey!" Alvarez called uselessly. Tina slid down the steep slope. She caught herself at the edge of the rushing, briny flow.

The scum was pale gray goo oozing from fresh cracks in the concrete. It smelled like floor cleaner and stung her fingers. She inched her way back up, hands rubbed raw.

"Been any maintenance here lately?"

"No, I checked," Alvarez said. "Just the biofilm treatment half a year back."

"Any modifications here?"

"Nope." Alvarez answered his comm, listened, then said, "Big choppers on the way. We better zero outta here."

She disliked losing what frail leads she had. She took a 3D camera from Alvarez and began snapping holographic shots of the gap. She was still clambering over ruptured concrete when six enormous helicopters came lumbering in from the east, a great rectangular block swaying on cables below each.

Alvarez took the hovercraft down the inward curve of the dike and onto the frothy flood waters. They sped away, heading inland toward half-submerged buildings. The choppers hovered one at a time and dropped their concrete plugs.

Tina listened to the pilots' running crosstalk on the hovercraft comm. They gingerly released their plugs, neatly jamming up the break.

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"Think it'll hold?" Alvarez asked, swinging the craft in close for an inspection.

Tina squinted. "Better." No plug was perfect, but this had stopped most of the gushing white plumes of the sea.

They turned inland. Pacific Coast Highway was meters below the water. Signs poking above the swirling water proclaimed that this was Main Street—a district, she remembered, devoted to boutiques and memorabilia from the lost days when this had been a sandy daydream land, blissful surfer country.

They sped along Main, ignoring the shouts of people marooned on roofs. "Safe enough where they are," Tina said.

A man in a dirty T-shirt with HOT TO TROTSKY printed on it gave them an obscene gesture. She turned away, trying to think.

The hovercraft growled, cutting toward the north, but the water did not get more shallow. Bedraggled people perched atop cars and houses, looking like drowned rats.

"Hey!" Alvarez pointed. A body floated face down in a narrow alley. They edged down between garages, water lapping against peeling paint.

Tina hauled in the body, an elderly woman. The arms were already stiffening. Until now Tina had been abstractly precise, gathering data. The woman's sad, wrinkled face sobered her. The brown eyes were open, staring out across the Pacific floodwaters at a distant shore only the dead can see.

They kept on.

Somehow the salty tang of the air lulled her momentarily, as if a part of her wished to withdraw from a world made abruptly raw and solid. She stared into the murky, muddy-brown waters as they skimmed over lawns. She thought of all the sopping rugs and stained furniture inside these elegant homes, the damage from the sea's casual embrace. Hunger and an old lethargy came upon her. The purring hovercraft seemed to drag her down into a soft, gauzy daydream. She often used this dazed state, allowing her subconscious to fumble with a problem when her more alert self could not make progress. The blurred sounds and smells dropped away around her and she let go. Only for a moment.

4

Russ wondered what shape and size of man had designed the forward seat. He peered forward through a smeared viewport, which barked his knees against the rough iron. The autotruck had been fashioned from Ganymede ore and nobody had bothered to polish rough edges. The seat

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bit into him through his skinsuit and somehow the iron cabin smelled bitter, as if some acid had gotten in at the foundry.

But, far more important, the cabin was *warm.* The Ganymede cold had seeped into them on the march. They kept the interior heaters on high, basking in it.

He had slept well with the narrative line running in his head. Three watch changes had refreshed them all and had carried him partway through Tina's vexing puzzle. The detail in the story was riveting—all sights and sounds seemed real, crisp, vivid. It took longer to dream than the "real" time of the story.

The experience was always strange, like drifting through a moist, silky world. The symphony of intricately realized dreaming did something real dreams could not—tap deep wellsprings of the unconscious, while imposing the closure of a concrete story line. He had felt himself caught up in the problems of Tina—real ones, yes, but comfortably distant all the same.

Adventure, he thought wryly, was somebody else doing something dangerous a long way off. Earthside's continuing struggle against the greenhouse effect was quite pleasant, compared with Ganymede.

He sighed and watched the rutted terrain ahead closely. There had been no sign of activity during the day they had ridden in the autotruck. The truck was sluggish, careful, dumb. It had stopped twice to pick up ore canisters from robot mines. The ore came out of a hole in the ground on a conveyor belt. There were no higher order machines around to notice three stowaway humans.

Russ got out of the seat, having to twist over a cowling, and jerked a thumb at Nye to take over. They switched every half hour because after that you couldn't stay alert. Zoti was asleep in the back. He envied her. He had caught some down time but his nerves got to him after a few hours.

"Helmet," he called. Russ pulled his on and watched Nye zip up. Zoti slept with hers on, following orders. The pleasure of being under pressure was hard to give up.

He climbed out the broken back hatch. Nye had riddled it but the pressure seal inside self-healed. Russ used handholds to scramble onto the corrugated top of the truck. He could see much further from here. Watching the rumpled hills reassured him somehow. Scrunched down below, staring out a slit, it was too easy to imagine Feds creeping up on them.

Overhead, Jupiter eclipsed the sun. The squat pink watermelon planet seemed to clasp the hard point of white light in a rosy glow, then swallowed it completely. Now Europa's white, cracked crescent would be the major light in the sky for three-and-a-half hours, he calculated. A rosy

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halo washed around the rim of Jupiter's atmosphere as sunlight refracted through the transparent outer layers.

He wished he could get the crazy, whirling geometry of this place straight in his head. The Feds had knocked down all navsats, and he couldn't stay on the air long enough to call for a position check with the carrier. This truck was carrying them away from Hiruko Station, he thought. It would be reassuring to get some sort of verification, though. No pickup mission would risk coming in close to Hiruko.

He took out his Fujitsu transponder and tapped into the external power jack. He had no idea where the carrier was now so he just aimed the pistol-grip antenna at the sky and got off a quick microwave MAYDAY burst. That was all the carrier needed to know they were alive, but getting a fix on them would be tough.

Job done, he sat and watched the slow swirling dance of the sky. No flashes, so maybe the battle was over. Only for a while, though. Neither side was going to give up the inner moons.

Russ grinned, remembering how just a few years back some of his Earthside buddies had said a real war out here was pointless. Impossible, too.

Too far away, they said. Too hard.

Even after the human race had moved into the near-Earth orbits, scattering their spindly factories and cylinder-cities and rock-hopping entrepreneurs, the human race was dominated by nay-saying groundhogs.

Sure, they had said, space worked. Slinging airtight homes into orbit at about one astronomical unit's distance from the sun was—in retrospect—an obvious step. After all, there was a convenient moon nearby to provide mass and resources.

But Earth, they said, was a benign neighborhood. You could resupply most outposts within a few days. Except for the occasional solar storm, when winds of high energy particles lashed out, the radiation levels were low. There was plenty of sunshine to focus with mirrors, capture in great sheets of conversion wafers, and turn into bountiful, high quality energy.

But Jupiter? Why go *there?*

Scientific teams had already touched down on the big moons in the mid twenty-first century, even dipped into the thick atmosphere. By counting craters and taking core samples, they deduced what they could about how the solar system evolved. After that brief era of quick-payoff visits, nobody had gone back. One big reason, everyone was quick to point out, was the death rate in those expeditions: half never saw Earth again, except as a distant blue-white dot.

Scientists don't tame new worlds; pioneers do. And except for the bands of religious or political refugee/fanatics, pioneers don't do it for nothing.

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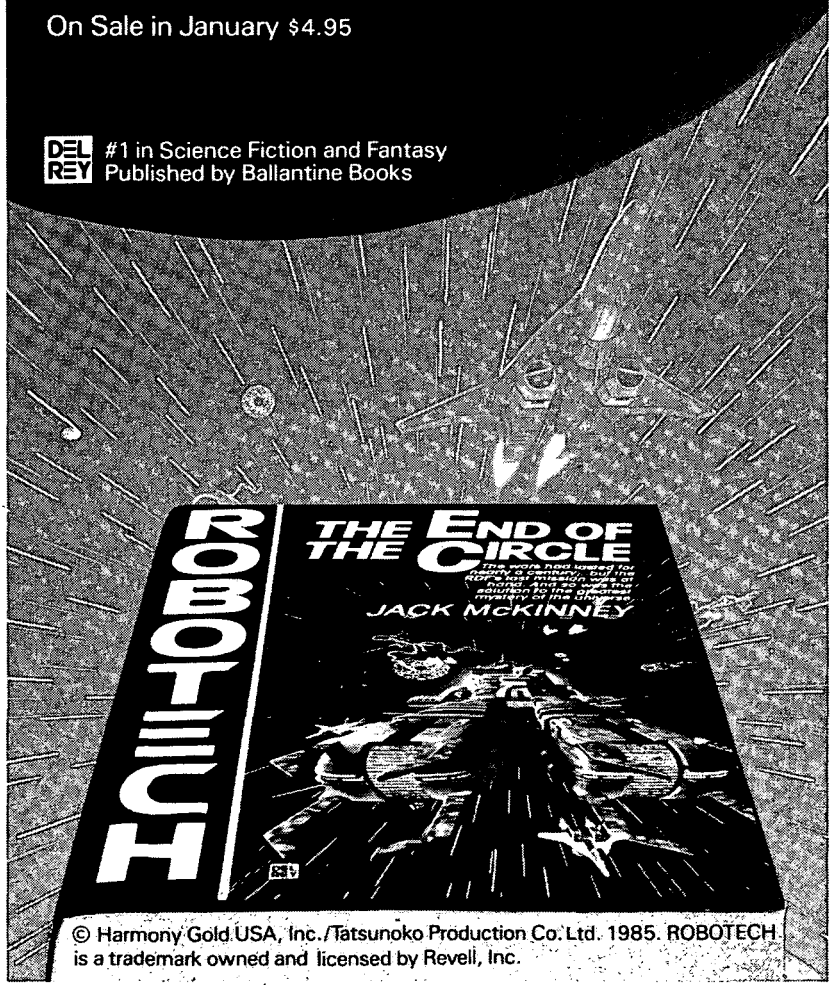

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By 2050 humans had already begun to spread out of the near-Earth zone. The bait was the asteroids—big tumbling lodes of metal and rock, rich in heavy elements. These flying mountains could be steered slowly from their looping orbits and brought into near-Earth rendezvous. The delta-V wasn't all that large.

There, smelters melted them down and fed the factories steady streams of precious raw materials: manganese, platinum, cadmium, chromium, molybdenum, tellurium, vanadium, tungsten, and all the rare metals. Earth was running out of these, or else was unwilling to pollute its biosphere to scratch the last fraction out of the crust. Processing metals was messy and dangerous. The space factories could throw their waste into the solar wind, letting the gentle push of protons blow it out to the stars.

For raw materials, corporations like Mosambi and Kundusu grubstaked loners who went out in pressurized tin cans, sniffing with their spectrometers at the myriad chunks. Most of them were duds, but a rich lode of vanadium, say, could make a haggard, antisocial rockrat into a wealthy man. Living in zero-gravity craft wasn't particularly healthy, of course. You had to scramble if a solar storm blew in, and crouch behind an asteroid for shelter. Most rock-hoppers disdained the heavy shielding that would ward off cosmic rays, figuring that their stay would be short and lucky, so the radiation damage wouldn't be fatal. Many lost that bet.

One thing they could not do without, though, was food and air. That proved to be the pivot-point that drove mankind still further out.

Life runs on the simplest chemicals. A closed artificial biosphere is basically a series of smoldering fires: hydrogen burns with oxygen to give water; carbon burns into carbon dioxide, which plants eat; nitrogen combines in the soil so the plants can make proteins, enabling humans to be smart enough to arrange all this artificially.

The colonies that swam in near-Earth orbits had run into this problem early. They needed a steady flow of organic matter and liquids to keep their biospheres balanced. Supply from Earth was expensive. A better solution was to search out the few asteroids which had significant carbonaceous chondrites—rock rich in light elements: hydrogen, oxygen, carbon, nitrogen.

There were surprisingly few. Most were pushed painfully back to Earth orbit and gobbled up by the colonies. By the time the rockhoppers needed light elements, the asteroid belt had been picked clean.

Besides, bare rock is unforgiving stuff. Getting blood from a stone was possible in the energy-rich cylinder cities. The loose, thinly spread coalition of prospectors couldn't pay the stiff bills needed for a big-style conversion plant.

From Ceres, the largest asteroid, Jupiter loomed like a candy-striped

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beacon, far larger than Earth. The rockrats lived in the broad band between two and three astronomical units out from the sun—they were used to a wan, diminished sunshine, and had already been tutored in the awful cold. For them it was no great leap to Jove, hanging there 5.2 times further from the sun than Earth.

They went for the liquids. Three of the big moons—Europa, Ganymede, and Callisto—were immense iceballs. True, they circled endlessly the most massive planet of all, 318 times the mass of Earth. That put them deep down in a gravitational well. Still, it was far cheaper to send a robot ship coasting out to Jupiter, and looping into orbit around Ganymede, than it was to haul water up from the oceans of Earth. The first stations set up on Ganymede were semi-automatic—meaning a few unlucky souls had to tend the machinery.

And here came some of that machinery now.

Russ slid back and lay down on the truck's flat roof. Ahead a team of robos was digging away. They had a hodgepodge of tracks and arms and didn't look dangerous. The biggest one threw out a rust-red stream of ore which the others were sampling.

One of the old exploration teams, then. He hoped they'd just ignore the truck.

"What'll we do?" Nye whispered over comm.

"Shut up," Russ answered.

The truck seemed to hesitate, deciding whether to grind over to the robos. A small robo noticed this and came rolling over on balloon tires.

Russ froze. This robo looked intelligent. It was probably the team leader and could relay an alarm.

Still lying flat, Russ wormed his way over to the edge of the truck roof. He brought his heavy pilot's hands forward and waited, hoping he blended into the truck's profile.

The robo seemed to eye the truck with swiveling opticals. The truck stopped. The robo approached, extended a telescoping tube. Gingerly it began to insert this into the truck's external socket.

Russ watched the robo's opticals focus down on its task. Then he hit it carefully in the electrical cowling. His hand clanged on the copper cowling and dented it. The robo jerked, snatching back its telescope arm.

The robo was quick. It backed away on its wobbly wheels, but just a little too fast. They spun. It slewed around on the ice.

Russ jumped down while the robo was looking the other way. It might already be transmitting an image. He hit the cowling again and then pried up the copper sheet metal. With two fingers he sheared off three bundles of wire.

The robo stopped. Its external monitor rippled with alarm lights. Russ

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cut some more and the alarms went off. MECHANICAL DAMAGE, the robo's status digitals said.

The other robos just kept on studying the soil.

Zoti was coming out of the rear hatch when he climbed back on the truck. "Back inside," he said. "Let's go."

They got away fast. Those robos had been easy only because no Feds had gotten around to reprogramming them.

Soon enough, somebody would. They were in for a long war out here. He could feel it in his bones.

Trouble was, Earthly interests swung plenty of weight—and mass—even out here. The old north-south division of wealth and ability was mirrored in the solar system, though warped. The Southern Confederation Feds wanted a greater share of the Jovian wealth. So they had seized a few Northern Hemisphere ice-eating bases, like Hiruko Station. Those robos now labored for the Fed factories waiting in near-Earth orbit for the ore.

The shock of actual war, of death in high vacuum and biting, unearthly cold—that had reverberated through Earthside politics, exciting public horror and private thrills.

Earth had long been a leafy preserve, over-policed and under-armed. Battle and zesty victory gave the great publics of the now-docile planet a twinge of exquisite, forbidden sin.

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The economic motivations sank beneath the waves of eager surrogate participation. Unfortunately, the two were not so easily separated in the Jovian system. The first troops guarded the automatic plants on the moons. Thus they and the plants became first targets for the fleets that came accelerating into the system. Bucks blended with blood. Hiruko Station was the first to fall to the Feds. Now the only way to root them out was to blast the surface, hoping the ice mines would escape most of the damage. That had been *Asskicker II*'s job.

Russ wished he could get news of the fighting. Radio gave only meaningless coded buzzes, flittering through the hiss of the giant Van Allen belts. News would have distracted him from his other preoccupation: food. He kept remembering sizzling steaks and crisp fries and hot coffee so black you had to sip it slow.

Already he had to be careful in dividing up their rations. Last meal, Nye and Zoti had gotten into a petty argument about half a cereal bar. They knew there wasn't much left, even with the packs of Kitsov and Columbard.

He rode along, not minding the cold yet, thinking about fried eggs and

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bacon. Zoti came topside. She had been weapons officer and she shared his dislike of the cramped, blind cabin, even if it was warm. They were used to fighting from a cockpit, enveloped in 3D graphics, living in an all-seeing electronic world.

"I could do without this mud-hugger stuff," Zoti said on short-range suit comm.

"Mud, now that I'd like," Russ said.

"Yeah, this ice gets to me. Brrrr! Pretty, though."

Russ studied the gray-blue valley they were entering. Gullies cut the slopes. Fans of rusty gravel spread from them across the rutted, rolling canyon floor. It did have a certain stern beauty. "Hadn't noticed."

"Wouldn't mind living here."

He blinked. "Really?"

"Look, I grew up in a ten-meter can. Rockrats for parents."

"How you like this grav?"

"A seventh of a g? Great. More than I ever got on a tether."

"Your parents ever hit it big?"

"Last time I was home, we still measured out our water in cc's."

He waved at an ice tower they were passing. He hadn't been able to figure whether they were eroded remnants or some kind of extrusion, driven by the oddities of ice tectonics. "So to you this is real wealth."

"Sure." She gave him a quizzical glance. "What else is better'n ice? You can make air with it, burn the deuterium for power, grow crops—even swim."

"You ever done that?"

"In grav? Naw—but I sneaked into the water reserve tanks at Ceres once. Strangest thing I ever did."

"Like it better than zero g?"

She nodded enthusiastically. "*Every*thing's better in gravs."

"Everything?"

"Well," she gave him a veiled glance. "I haven't tried everything yet."

He smiled. "Try Earth normal sometime."

"Yeah, I heard it's pretty bad. But grav keeps everything steady. It *feels* better."

He had wrenched his back carrying the fusion warhead and felt a twinge from it as the truck lumbered through a depression. "Not so's I'd notice," he said moodily.

"Hey, cheer up. This's a holiday, compared to fighting."

"This *is* fighting. Just slow-motion, is all."

"I love it, ice and gravs."

"Could do with some better rations." It was probably not a good idea to bring up food, but Russ was trying to find a way to keep the talk going. For the first time he was feeling differently about Zoti.

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"Hell, at least we got plenty water."

The truck lurched again and Russ grunted despite himself. "Maybe we should carve out some more?"

"Sure," she said lightheartedly. "I'm getting so I can spot the pure water. Tastes better'n cruiser supply."

"Wait'll we get onto the flat. Don't want this truck to speed up and leave you behind."

"Take it off auto." They had already nearly left Zoti once when she laser-cut some water ice.

"Don't want the risk. We override, probably'll show up in a control system back at Hiruko."

"I don't think the Feds have had time to interface all these systems. Those Dagos don't know zip."

"They took Hiruko pretty easy."

"Snuck up on it! Listen, those oily bastards—" and she was off on a tirade. Russ was a Norther, too, born and bred, but he didn't have much feeling about political roots that ran back to lines drawn on Earth's old carcass. He listened to her go on about the filthy Feds and watched the lurching view and that was when he saw the bat.

It came over the far ice hills. Hard black against the slight haze of a yellow ammonia cloud, gliding when it could, jetting an ivory methane plume when it couldn't.

"Inside!" he whispered.

They scrambled off the truck roof. Zoti went in the rear hatch. He looked over the lip of the roof and saw the bat veer. It had seen them. It dove quickly, head on toward them.

The M18s were lashed to the roof. There wasn't time to get Zoti back out so he yanked an M18 free—making sure he got the one loaded with HE—and dropped off the back of the truck, slipping and landing on his ass. He stooped far over and ran by kicking back on the ice, so that he didn't bounce in the low gravity. He used the truck for cover while he got to the shelter of some jagged gray boulders.

It made one pass to confirm, sweeping in like an enormous thin bird, sensors swiveling. He wedged down among the rocks as it went over. It banked and turned quickly, coming back. Russ popped his helmet telescope out to full extension and saw that it carried rockets under the wings.

The bat lined up on the truck's tail and swooped down. It looked more like a kite from this angle, all airfoil and pencil-thin struts.

The bat was looking at the truck, not at him. He led it a full length and opened up with the HE shells. They bucked pretty bad and he missed with the first two rounds. The third caught it in the narrow fuselage. He

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saw the impact. Before he could grin a rocket fired from under the right wing and streaked straight for him, leaving an orange trail.

He ducked. The rocket fell short of the truck but close to him. The impact was like a sudden jar. He heard no sound, just found himself flat on his back. Mud and ice showered him.

The bat went on, not seeming to mind the gaping hole in its thin fuselage, but it also didn't rise any more. Then it started a lazy pitch, yawed—and suddenly was tumbling end over end, like a thrown playing card.

It became a geyser of black fragments against a snowy hill.

5

Russ had caught all the right signals from her, he thought.

It was dumb, he knew that, and so did she. But somehow the tension in them had wound one turn too many and a mere glance between them set all the rest in motion.

Sure enough, as soon as Nye left by the forward hatch to reconn over the hill, Zoti started shucking her skinsuit. Then her thin green overalls.

He wasn't far behind her. They piled their clothes on the deck and got down on them. He suggested a sitting position but she would have none of it. She was feverish and buoyant in the muted phosphor glow of the cabin, swiveling on him with exuberant soft cries. Danger, sweat, piercing cold—all wedded into a quick, ferocious, hungry battering that they exacted from each other, rolling and licking and slamming among the machine-oil smells and rough iron rub. Fast and then mysteriously, gravely slow, as though their senses stretched time in pursuit of oblivion.

It was over at last and then maybe not and then definitely not and then, very fast this time, over for sure. They smiled at each other through a glaze of sweat and dirt.

"Lord!" she gasped. "The best!"

"Ever?" Frank disbelief.

"Sure . . . " She gave him a sly smile. "The first, too."

"Huh? Oh, you mean—"

"First in real gravity, sure."

"Gravity has a way of simplifying your choices."

"I guess. Maybe everything really is better in gravs."

"Deck of an autotruck isn't the best setting."

"Damn straight. We'll give it a try in someplace better."

"You got a date." He got to his knees and started pulling on his blue longjohns.

Automatically he reviewed their situation, shifting back into reality after a blissful time away. He replayed events, trying to see it whole, to look for problems, errors.

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They had been forced to override the truck's controls. The bat had undoubtedly reported something, maybe even direct vid images of them. So Zoti and Nye had conferred over the board and got the truck off its designated route.

They left the marked track and ground gears to work their way up among the jagged hills. An hour later two bats came zooming over. By that time Nye had gotten the truck back into a cave. They had left the snow two klicks back, picking their way over rocky ridges, so the bats had no tracks to follow.

They sat there edgily while the bats followed a search pattern, squaring off the valley and then other valleys, gradually moving away.

That had given Russ time to think and get hungry and eat. They didn't have much food left. Or time. Unless the Norther fleet kept Hiruko busy, the Feds would have time to send a thorough, human-led search party.

So they had to change tactics. But keep warm.

Hiruko probably had this truck identified by now.

Which meant they needed another truck. Fast.

Once they'd broken the code seal on the truck's guidance, they had access to general tracking inventory. Nye had found the nearest truck, about fifteen kilometers away. They had edged out of the cave when an ivory fog came easing in from the far range of rumpled mountains.

The truck moved pretty fast when its cautious nav programs were bypassed. They had approached the target truck at an angle, finally lying in wait one hill over from its assigned path.

And when Nye went out to reconn the approaching truck, Russ and Zoti had taken one swift look at each other, one half-wild glance, and had seized the time.

Nye came back through the hatch as Zoti tucked her black hair into her neck ring.

"It's coming. No weapons visible." Nye looked from Zoti to Russ, puzzled.

Russ realized he was still flushed and sweaty. "Good," he said energetically. "Let's hit it."

"Better hurry," Nye said, his face narrowing again as he concentrated on tactics. "It just loaded up at a mine."

"Okay. Come out and help me on with my pack," Russ said.

Nye looked surprised. "You still gonna carry that warhead?"

Russ nodded. "Regs."

"Look, we gotta *move*. Nobody'd expect—"

"You want to pay for it when we get back?"

Nye shrugged. "Your hassle, man."

"Right," Russ said evenly.

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The second truck was moving stolidly down a narrow canyon. It had the quality of a bumbling insect, dutifully doing its job.

"Flank it?" Zoti asked as they watched the truck's approach.

"Okay," Russ said. "You two take it from the sides, just after it passes."

"And you?" Nye asked sarcastically.

"Hit it right where the canyon necks in. See? I'll come in from the top."

It had finally occurred to him that the light gravity opened the choices of maneuver. He leaped from the nearest ledge, arcing out over the canyon and coming down on the top of the truck.

Zoti and Nye fired at the rear hatch, rounds skipping off the thick gray iron. A fighting machine, Class II infantry, popped out the front hatch.

It clanked and swiveled awkwardly. It had heavy guns built into both arms and started spraying the rear of the truck, chipping the metal corners. It hadn't registered Russ yet. When it did a small gun popped out of the machine's top and fired straight at him. He shot the machine three times and it tumbled over and broke in half.

Russ didn't get to see it fall. A heavy round went through his shoulder. It sent a white-hot flower of agony through him and knocked him off the truck. He landed on his neck.

6

Ironies abounded here. Once a sleepy beach town devoted to the elixirs of sun and surf, Huntington Beach's major problem had been the traffic trying to reach the sand on Saturday afternoons. Now the problem was stopping the Pacific from getting to the people.

Tina was thinking furiously, her brow knitted sternly, when the Orange County observation dirigible came humming into view, skimming over a stucco apartment complex. The silvery bullet gleamed in the dawn's crisp radiance.

Nguyen, the head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, called her on comm and ordered them to come up. Tina had never liked the ride up the spindly cable, but this time she was so interested in the spectacle she scarcely noticed. In the gondola beneath the great silvery belly Nguyen stood stiffly watching the disaster below.

He was short, intense, direct. His first words were, "What happened?"

"Something structural," Tina said. "I want to look at the whole dike from the sea side."

"Okay." He gestured to the pilot. The dirigible purred and moved sluggishly seaward. "Should I declare an emergency all along the line?"

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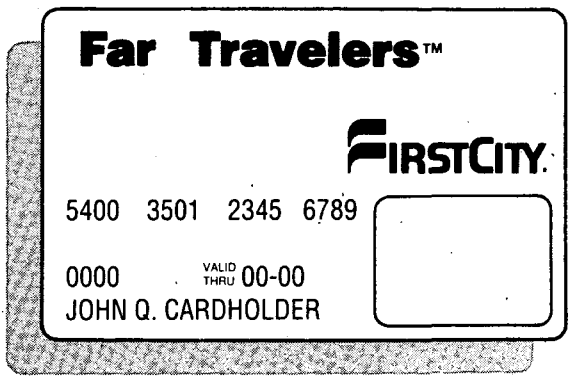
The Shape of Things to Come



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"Wait'll I think this through. And check this out." She handed him a flake of concrete with a dab of the gray goo on it.

"From here?" Nguyen sniffed at it.

"You've got a portable chem lab in the next deck, right?"

"Yes, but this is plainly an engineering malfunction. What—"

"Just do it."

She put off further questions by moving to the windows. The dark waters reached far inland to Talbert Avenue, sweeping north as far as the wetlands where the Naval Weapons Depot had been. Most buildings had their first floors submerged. Trees ringed most buildings as energy-conserving measures—shade in summer, shelter against cool winds in winter.

She thought wryly about how linked the human predicament was. The worldwide greenhouse effect had forced energy conservation to save burning oil. Global warming had also made the oceans expand and melted ice at the poles, bringing on this flood. And now people were perched in the trees, keeping dry. Maybe the hominids should never have left the trees in the first place.

The dirigible swooped along the dike's northward curve. They could stay up here forever, burning minimal fuel, another saving measure mandated by the Feds. As they swung lower Tina picked out the pale green of the biofilm protectant which was regularly applied to the dike's outer ramparts.

She asked Alvarez, "Anything new about that last painting?"

He consulted his portable data screen. "Nope. Supposed to be better, was all."

"How?"

"Stops barnacles and stuff from eatin' away at the concrete."

"Just a cleaner?"

"Lays down a mat, keeps stuff from growin'."

Now she recalled. Tina knew little about biotechnology, but she understood as an engineer what corrosive seawater did. Biofilm was a living safeguard that stopped sea life from worming its way into porous concrete. It pre-empted surfaces, colonizing until it met like biofilm, forming a light green shield which lasted years.

"See those splotches?" She pointed at the sea bulwarks near the break in the dike. Gray spots marred the green biofilm.

Nguyen asked, "Seaweed?"

"Wrong color."

Alvarez frowned. "How could li'l microorganisms . . . ?"

"Burrowing back into cracks, growing, forcing them open," Tina said, though her voice was more certain than she felt.

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Nguyen countered, "But this product has been tested for over a decade."

"Maybe it's changed?" Alvarez asked.

Nguyen shook his head. "You said this last painting was even better. I don't see how—"

"Look," Tina said, "biotech isn't just little machines. It's *alive*."

"So?" Nguyen asked.

"Life keeps changing. It evolves. Mutates."

Nguyen blinked, disconcerted. "At this one spot?"

"Some microbe goes awry, starts eating concrete," Tina said. "And reproduces itself—there're plenty of nutrients in seawater."

The chemlab report came in then, appearing on the central screen beside the pilot's chair. Even she, an engineer, could see the gray goo wasn't the same as the biofilm.

"We're right," Nguyen said.

She eyed the long curve of the dike toward Long Beach, where offshore wedges protected the beaches. Vast stretches of anchored defenses. Were all these great earthworks being chewed up by the very biotech engineered to protect them? Ironies abounded today.

"Perhaps this is a local mutation," Nguyen said.

"For now, yes," Tina said.

"Means the product's vulnerable, though," Alvarez said, his eyebrows knitted together in worry. "Happened here, could happen anywhere. Those dikes they're puttin' in the Potomac, right by the Lincoln monument, f'instance."

Tina looked inland, where the monumental energies of Orange County had filled in the spaces left by 'quake damage. The Big One and the greenhouse effect had hardly slowed down these people.

Their gesture of uncowed exuberance rose in Irvine to the south: the Pyramid. Four-sided and the size of the Pharaohs' tombs, but inverted. Its peak plunged into the ground like an impossible arrowhead, gossamer steel and glass, supported at the corners by vertical burnt-chrome columns. Impossible but eerily real, catching the cutting sunrise glow. Its refracting radiance seemed to uplift the toylike buildings that groveled around it.

A brown splotch coated one side of the Pyramid. She saw that it was one of the new biofilm cleaners, working its way around the Pyramid while it absorbed dirt and tarnish. Could that moving carpet go awry, too? Weaken the walls?

"There's going to be plenty of questions to answer," she said distantly.

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"Be expensive to replace that biofilm," Nguyen said. "But essential, to avoid such incidents."

"How much you figure this little 'incident' will cost?" Alvarez asked.

"Five, six billion."

"Really?" Tina was surprised. "Six billion Yen?"

"Or more," Nguyen said.

Tina hoped there were few dead. This whole incident was dumb, because somebody should have foreseen this biotech weakness. But engineers could not foresee everything, anymore than geologists could predict earthquakes. Technology was getting to be as vast and imponderable as natural forces. The world kept handing your dreams back to you as reworked nightmares.

But they had no choice but to use technology—imperfect, human crafts, undaunted gestures before the infinite. The county lived by that belief, and today some died by it. But she knew in her bones that these people blessed by sun and ocean would keep on.

7

Russ still had to shake his head to jerk himself out of the sunny, airy spaces of Huntington Beach. He had never been there, never even been in North America, but now he longed to be lying on a beach beneath a fireball sun.

Story-sleep wasn't supposed to cling to you like that. Maybe the extremity of his pain had screwed up the effects. Zoti had given him the sleepstory plug in an effort to supplement the autodoc as it worked on him. He could feel the hours of repair work in his left shoulder socket. A patch job, but at least the worst of the pain had ebbed.

Worse, his own memories were warped when he tried to review them. He blinked and could not bring the stale, sweaty cabin into focus. He knew Nye was saying something, but he couldn't make out what it was.

A single picture flitted through his mind. He had crashed in *Asskicker II,* but not on Ganymede. Saturn hung in the black behind the ship. And his helmet was metal, no faceplate. Comically, a road sign pointed to Earthly destinations.

Disturbing. Was the sleepstory intruding into his longterm memory? Rewriting his life, rubbing out some features, heightening others? He would have to watch himself. If the other two caught on, he wouldn't have much conviction as a commander.

Not that he had a whole lot right now. His head dipped with fatigue and he barely caught himself before his chin struck his chest. He wiped feverish sweat from his eyes with a claw-hand.

Nye, yes, Nye was talking. What . . . ?

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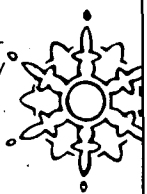

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"Actually," Nye said with a sly sort of humor, "that shoulder may not be the worst news you got."

Russ let his head clear. He was not in a terrific mood. Nye's wit went unremarked. "What?"

"I got a readout on this truck's itinerary. Didn't have to bust into the command structure to do it, either." Nye grinned proudly.

"Great." His neck hurt worse than his shoulder. The truck's rumbling, shifting progress seemed to provoke jabbing pains all down his spine. The bandage over his shoulder wound pulled and stung. Aside from this he was merely in a foul mood.

"We're going to Hiruko Station," Nye said. "Drop off the ore."

"Well, that doesn't matter," Zoti said. "We'll just jump off somewhere."

Russ nodded blearily. His mouth was dry and he didn't feel like talking. "Right. Steal another. Play musical trucks with the Feds."

"Better hurry. We're less than twenty klicks from Hiruko."

"*What?*" Russ barked.

Zoti's mouth made a precise, silent O.

"Looks like you had us pointing the wrong way all along," Nye said, his humor dissolving into bitterness.

Russ made himself take a breath. "Okay. Okay."

There didn't seem much more to say. He had probably screwed up the coordinates, gotten something backward. Or maybe the first truck took a turn that fouled up his calculations.

It didn't matter. Excuses never did, not unless you got back to the carrier and a board of inquiry decided they wanted to go over you with a microscope.

Zoti said carefully, "So close—they will pick us up easily if we leave the truck."

"Yeah," Nye said. "I say we ride this truck in and give up. Better'n freezing our tails, maybe get shot at, then have to give up anyway."

"We bail out now," Russ said.

"You hear what I said?" Nye leaned over Russ, trying to intimidate him. "That's *dumb!* They'll—"

Russ caught him in the face with a right cross that snapped Nye's head around and sent him sprawling. For once his pilot's hands were an advantage, heavy and hard.

Russ was sitting on the floor of the truck cabin and he didn't want to bother to get up. He also wasn't all that sure that he could even throw a punch while standing anyway. So when Nye's eyes clouded and the big man came at him Russ kicked Nye in the face, lifting his boot from the deck and catching Nye on the chin. Nye fell face down on the deck. Russ breathed deeply and waited for his neck to stop speaking to him. By that

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time Zoti was standing over Nye with a length of pipe. He waved her away.

"Now, I'm going to pretend you just slipped and banged your head," Russ said evenly. "Because we got to get out of here fast and I don't want to have to shoot you for insubordination or cowardice in the face of the enemy or any of those other lawyer's reasons. That would take time and we don't have time. So we just go on like you never did anything. Got that?"

Nye opened his mouth and then closed it. Then he nodded.

"Do you . . . " Zoti hesitated. "Do you think we *can* get away?"

"We don't have to," Russ said. "We just have to hide."

"Hide and freeze," Nye said sourly. "How's the carrier gonna—"

"We won't hide long. How much time will it take this truck to reach Hiruko?"

"Three, maybe four hours. It's going to a smelting plant on the rim of the first bubble. I—"

"Close enough for government work," Russ said. He felt infinitely tired and irritable and yet he knew damn well he was going to have to stay awake until all this was done.

Zoti said, "Are you sure you can . . . ?"

He breathed in the stale cabin air. The world veered and whirled.

"No, matter of fact, I'm not."

8

The fusion warhead went off prettily on the far horizon. A brilliant flash, then a bulging yellow-white ball.

Nye had rigged the trigger to go if anybody climbed through the hatch. He further arranged a small vid eye and stuck it into the truck's grille, so they got a good look at the checkpoint which stopped the truck. It was within sight of the rearing, spindly towers of Hiruko Station. The town was really rather striking, Russ thought. Some of the towers used deep blue ice in their outer sheaths, like spouts of water pointing eternally at Jupiter's fat face.

Too bad it all had to go, he thought. The three of them were lying beneath an overhang, facing Hiruko. They ducked their heads when they saw a Fed officer scowl at the truck, walk around it, then pop the forward hatch. He looked like just the officious sort Russ hated, the kind that always gigged him on some little uniform violation just as he was leaving base on a pass.

So he couldn't help grinning mirthlessly when the flash lit the snow around them. The warhead was a full 1.2 megs. Of course it was supposed to be a klick-high air burst, designed to take out the surface structures and Feds and leave the mines. This was a ground-pounder and it sent

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a wave they watched coming toward them across the next valley. He didn't have time to get to his feet so he just rolled out from under the ledge. The wave slammed into their hill and he felt a soft thump nearby. Then the sound slapped him hard and he squeezed his eyes shut against the pain in his neck.

When he opened them Zoti was looking into his face anxiously. He grinned. She sat in the snow and grinned back saucily.

He looked beyond her. The hill had folded in a little and the ledge wasn't there any more. Neither was Nye.

If it had just been snow that fell on him they might have had some chance. He had gotten partway out from under the ledge, nearly clear. But solid ice and some big rocks had come down on him and there wasn't any hope. They dug him out anyway. It seemed sort of pointless because then all they could think to do was bury him again.

The bomb cloud over Hiruko dispersed quickly, most of the radioactive debris thrown clear off the moon.

Russ recalled their crash of only a few days before. It seemed to lie far back in a curiously constricted past. Now anything was possible.

His memory was still stained by the dislocations he had suffered under sleep-story, though. Sometimes, when he looked out of the corner of his eye, he would seem to see that woman, her tanned face creased by a studious frown. Tina, triumphant engineer. People like her were holding the sad, fat Earth together.

While people like himself fought over the baubles of the outer solar system. Was that what his scrambled memory meant? A foreshadowing of himself, standing on a moon of Saturn? Could the war spread that far, leaving him with a steel skull?

He shook his head. Tina would not leave him.

He had always liked historical sleepstories, the immersion in a simpler time. But maybe no era was simple. They only looked that way from a distance. The way cities looked better at night, because you couldn't see the dirt.

They sat in a protected gully, soaking up what sunlight there was, and waited. As a signal beacon the fusion burst couldn't be beat. Carrier ships came zooming over within an hour.

A survey craft slipped in low on the horizon a little later. Only when it was in sight did Zoti produce the rest of their food. They sat on a big flat orange rock and ate the gluelike bars through their helmet input slots. It tasted no better than usual but nobody cared. They were talking about gravity and its myriad delights.

9

Tina settled into bed, the crisp white sheets caressing her with a vel-

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vety touch. The long day was finally over, though crews still worked under floodlights all along the coast. But her job was basically done.

Now the biotech jocks were on the hot plate. The media were making a big deal out of the incident. She had turned down three network interviews already.

She ached for sleep, especially after her long, luxuriant bath. Rachel came in with herbal tea to soothe her further.

But she needed something more. Languidly she reached for the sleep-story module and slipped its pressors to the base of her neck. This would plunge her to the deepest realm of slumber.

Which plotline? Logic said that after the day's events she should choose something soothing. She cocked an eyebrow at the choices. A strong storyline, maybe, with a virile male protagonist. She liked someone she could identify with.

She liked war stories and science fiction. Maybe a combination . . .

She thumbed in her choice and lay back with a sensual sigh.

Music, soft at first, then simmering with dissonant strains of tension.

She was on a bleak, rutted plain. A smashed ship lay behind her and cold bit through her thin skinsuit. Jupiter churned on the rumpled gray horizon. She glanced down at her hands, which already ached from the chill, and found that they were four-fingered clamps.

This is going to be quite an adventure, she thought. ●

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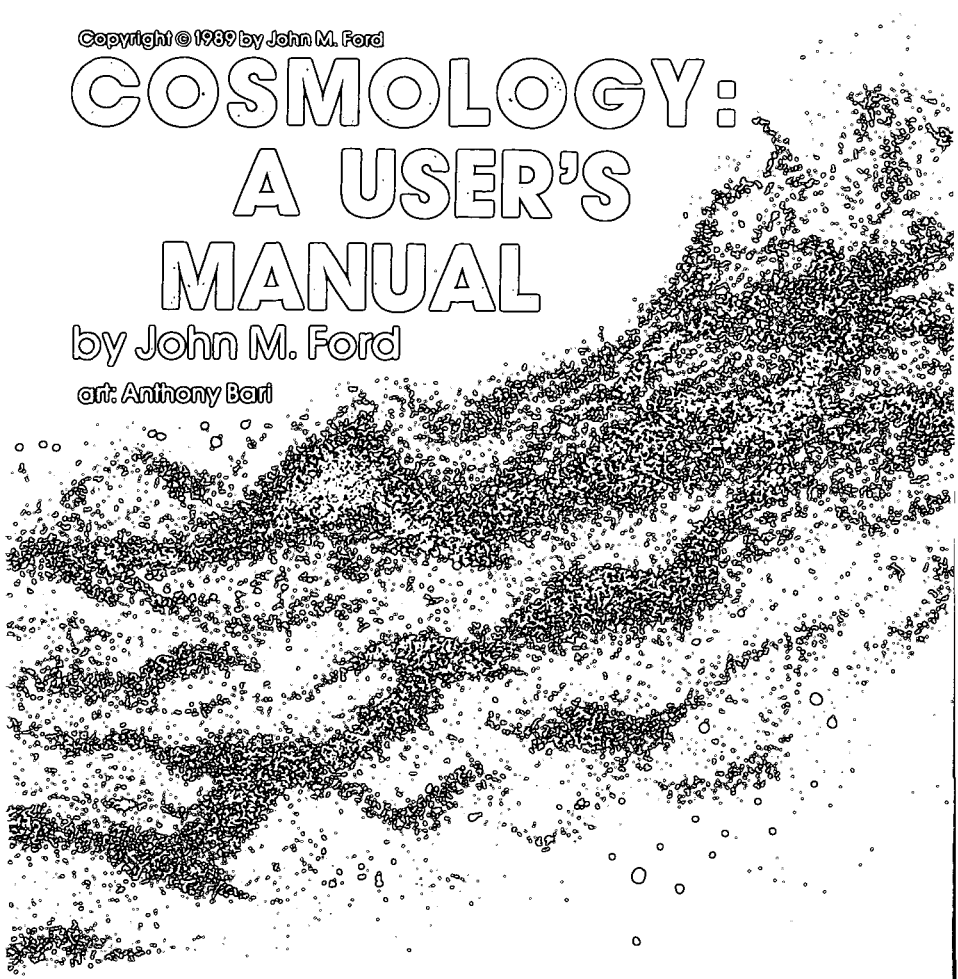
COSMOLOGY: A USER'S MANUAL

by John M. Ford

art: Anthony Bari



First Cause, the Word, Big Bang—what name you choose,
One bright note sounds. A symphony ensues.

ANTHROPIC PRINCIPLE.
If we, who love the light, had never been,
The stars would find new shoes for dancing in.

BOUNDARY CONDITION.
Beyond, no fusion burns to light the stars;
The waves will not collapse, the joke won't parse.

CAUSALITY.
First one cuts down the tree, then hears it fall—
It seems we don't need this one, after all.

DARK MATTER.
Our sight and hearing span the spectrum, yet
Most of the universe plays hard-to-get.

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EMISSION LINES.
The stellar fires are profligate indeed,
And what they throw away, we glean and read.
FERMI'S PARADOX.
Hello out there! We're here! Do come and play!
Don't mind what our old broadcast quanta say.
GRAND UNIFIED THEORY.
You hold the chalk, and I'll apply the glue;
Oh, dear, that's loose again. One's never through—
HUBBLE CONSTANT.
The galaxies rush on; the redshifts climb,
And loneliness increases over time.
INFLATIONARY UNIVERSE.
When it was new, the cosmos moved right quick;
Then (sound familiar?) things began to stick.
JEANS, JAMES.
"Like a great thought," he said, but did not cease
To search and blueprint its machineries.
KEPLER, JOHANNES.
He wished elliptic orbits to prove wrong,
Yet still proposed them. Reason's whips are strong.
LORENZ CONTRACTION.
If you will not stand still, while I do so,
I shall see you diminished as you go.
MICROWAVE BACKGROUND.
The cosmic egg-shell cupped against your ear,
The rush of the dark ocean's plain to hear.
NON-EUCLIDEAN GEOMETRY.
It's not that he was wrong, the clever Greek;
But where bare Beauty's seen from, so to speak.
OPEN/OSCILLATING UNIVERSE.
So will it stop, or not? The answer tells
Much less about the stars than of ourselves.
PLANCK EPOCH.
One flash when gravity was consummate—
No era spans less time, or greater weight.

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QUANTUM LEAP.
The particle is here, and then is there—
But never in between. How does it *dare?*
RELATIVITY.
One clock stayed on the ground; its double flew.
And *it ran slow.* So, then. The mad thing's true.
STRING THEORY.
The particles extend like tightened strings,
And when their frets are plucked, they chord all things.
THOUGHT EXPERIMENT.
First conjure up that one you love to please.
Now, once again, with quarks, or galaxies.
UNCERTAINTY PRINCIPLE.
Position, yes, or speed, but not the two:
To learn, to see, must be to alter, too.
VIRTUAL PARTICLES.
Some facts (see Heisenberg) we cannot know,
So mass can rise from void, and back there go.
WAVE FUNCTION.
Reduced to mathematics, matter's germ—
"Reduced?" What an unfeeling, thoughtless term!
X-RAY ASTRONOMY.
Beyond the atmosphere, a higher light
Proclaims unique new glories of the night.
YANG-MILLS THEORY.
All sterile are Narcissus and his twin:
When symmetries are broken, things begin.
Z^0 PARTICLES.
Too massive in thin space to ever thrive,
Yet, *rarae aves*, dinosaurs survive.
⁉
Heat death or cold, in randomness or Cause,
It is not how it ends, but what it was.

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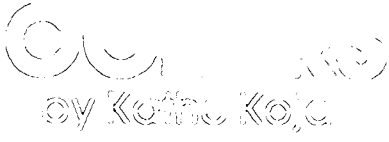

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Lake wind on Susin's lips, pale brown hair rustling like weeds, long brown legs ankle-crossed on the porch rail. This was her favorite place, this porch that hung like a sagging barnacle from the beach cottage, and this was her favorite time, the day over and Poole beside her. Poole was not his name, of course, or even close to it, only a syllable he had liked and kept. She had invented her name, too, or at least its spelling.

Faint pale ripple of his skin, long pupils' pulse to division, merging again as she watched. Sometimes she imagined she could see in his eyes not herself, but his real self, not the mannish shape he wore but him. She never got tired of watching him, of being with him.

He was the most important thing in her life, had been since the winter's morning she found him, dried skin sluggish and grainy to the touch, slick cadaver eyes peering up at her through a scum of lake debris. It took him almost a day to finally speak, throat working like a bellows, his voice so thick with sussuration she could barely understand him or how he came to be there. He had obviously been elsewhere, and not so far away either; in his oblique way, he made it plain how travel distressed him, after his long, original trip. She sat, skin shivering, listening to all he said, then made a careful nest of sleeping bag and blankets in the empty pantry room off the kitchen, and by doing so told him that he had come to stay. She never questioned for a moment what she did or why. She knew why.

His coming changed for her even the things he did not directly touch: the town, its people, its bland routine and blander tourists, as changeless as the lake. Susin had lived there all her life; it had never been her home. She moved among them even more as an outsider now, wearing the pride of her difference like a chip on her shoulder, thinking, if you knew, if you only knew.

Now, without looking, she felt Poole changing, the faint damp copper scent of his skin turning colors. She turned to face him like facing the sun, his skin not warm reds or golds but frigid gray, indigo, a slippery sinister purple, and then crawling patterns, austere, risky, like the skin of a snake. She sat with her body thrust forward, hands out not to touch but to mime touching.

"Beautiful," she said, "it's so beautiful." Poole nodded, once and solemnly, a learned motion, like shaking his head, like shrugging or smiling. He had learned them all and well, and used them easily.

He made more colors for her, until it was very dark, the water's sound rising with the wind. He sat changing, his skin chilling so the colors muddied, and Susin said, "Let's go in, okay?" and he followed her, screen door and paint-scratched front door, closing out the rest of the world.

Susin parked at the IGA, quick impatient slew of the rusty Dodge into

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a slim space between a Corvette and a Jeep. Across the street, she saw another in a summerlong parade of sidewalk Rembrandts, sketching like mad outside the plastic driftwood arch of She Sells Sea Shells (sweatshirts for the whole family, Gulls and Buoys). No big crowd, but if his work was pedestrian enough, ha ha, there surely would be. Let me guess, she thought. Seascapes, or Your Picture Five Dollars?

People buying hot dog buns, beer, big dusty bags of charcoal imprinted with a grinning bear in a chef's hat; Susin greeted no one, pushed her spavined cart like an icebreaker, spinach greens, ginger ale. Still no one watching the artist as she loaded the car, three greasy-feeling plastic sacks, and on impulse she walked over, sandals slapping, sweat on the back of her neck.

The work stopped her three feet from the easel: rich eerie colors, blues thick and juicy as blood, spidery lavender lines like the whorl of a desiccated shell. Shirtless, his back muscles working strongly as back and forth went the chalk, heavy swipes of red like the end of the world.

He saw or felt her, turned to regard her with a smileless gravity that swallowed her first sardonic comment ("Welcome to Philistine Valley"). His eyes unseen, covered by sunglasses someone else would have worn as a Halloween joke, nose richly sunburned, long hair pulled back in a messy plait, half-curly, half-straight, the color of expensive wine.

"I like your pictures," Susin said. It seemed inane after she had said it, but it was simply true: the colors reminded her of Poole.

"I like them too. Sometimes."

"You can't sell them here." That surprised them both, and, annoyed at herself, she said, "I mean, no one will *buy* them here." You think that's *better?* "I *mean*," forehead red, "the people here generally run to Norman Rockwell-type stuff, the dregs of the dregs. You know?"

He considered his pictures as with a customer's eye. "Well," and she heard more plainly the sinuous accent, the sea, not the lake, and summer suns hotter than the one burning overhead, "it's still fun to do them."

He plucked a piece of sweetest yellow chalk, worked it in a slippery vertical line, and Susin stepped farther back, watching as much the movements he made, the slight compression of his lips—full red underlip, like a child's—as the motion of the chalk. Two women came out from She Sells and edged Susin back, one step, three, and stood watching with heads cocked like busy birds. Susin made a hard little smile.

"If it's not on a T-shirt," she told Poole that night, slicing day-old rye bread for them both, "they can't understand it. The tourists are the worst, but the *locals*—" All her life, she had called them the locals. "He'll be gone in a week," she said.

A yellow flicker ran Poole's length. His tiny tongues extruded as he placed between them a slice of bread. "It's good for you," Poole said, "to

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see what the other ones miss." Susin smiled. It took an alien mind to know hers.

The artist was not gone, though. There were many drawings taped to the easel back, fresh new fluttering papers, and it seemed all the originals were still there too. He was sweating, squinting without his sunglasses, and his drawing was as hot as the pavement. Without stopping, he said to Susin, "You were right."

"I told you." It sounded smug, and she shook her head in private dismay. "I'm sorry—I think your work is beautiful." Two boys, skinny legs, boombox, expensive running shoes, their sneer expert as they passed, but Susin did not deign to sneer back at them. "I'd like to buy one of your pictures. That one—" pointing on impulse to a wash of ivory and gray, speared with long plinths of iridescent lime.

"That's an old one. You can have it."

"No," firmly. "I want to buy it."

"No good unless it costs you, huh?" She shook her head, then saw his smile, pliant choirboy curve. He shrugged when she handed him a twenty. "I can't make change for that."

"Then I'll buy you a coffee."

It was too hot for coffee, so they sat in the stuffy shade of her car, drinking Cokes. His name was Robin, and he smiled again when she told him her name, spelling it. He talked, in his faint rounded drawl, not of adventures but situations, a gas station, a swimming pool, an empty field. And all the time one hand, blunt, long-fingered, picked and flattened the fraying upholstery, unconscious creation.

"Where are you staying now?" she asked him.

"The King's Shore," he said. "Pretty fancy name for a place with plastic bedspreads." He drank the last of his Coke, wiped his mouth on his sleeve like a child. "Thanks again," and slid across the seat, out the door, bending to smile once more into the open passenger window.

As soon as she got home, she showed the picture to Poole. He did not speak or praise, but from the depths of his throat came the faint atonal keening that marked emotion, and his hands on the paper pulsed its colors, held it so long that Susin, namelessly disturbed, reached to take it back. At once, he leaned away from her, the lines of his body taut, uneasy.

"You can have it, if you want," Susin said. She had stepped back unconsciously, stepped away from him, and when she saw this, stepped consciously forward. "Put it in your room, if you want to."

He did, and that night slept beneath it, face turned as if to catch its light. He spent much of his time crouched under it, his color almost null, only a faint freckling of green beneath his blinkless eyes. She was almost

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sorry she had given the picture to him—sorrier when, seeing her watching him, he deliberately closed his door.

He said little for the next few weeks, not seeming to mind that she was away, now, more than formerly. She watched Robin's colors now, as she had once watched Poole's: intently, eyes half-closed and rich with the sting of them. She tried once or twice to explain her absences to Poole, apologize if he was feeling neglected, but he shook his head. No, he did not mind, he said, it was very peaceful there in the cottage alone.

"What do you do?" Susin asked, and Poole gave her a look. Read, he told her, pointing to the neat rectangle of newspapers beside his sleeping place. Read and listen to the water. And think, he added, with an involuntary look upward, at Robin's picture.

It was unusually hot the next day, the sky a charcoal color, almost liquid in its humidity. Susin drove past She Sells, but Robin was gone. Frowning, she turned for the motel, asked at the desk for his room number.

"He moved out," the clerk told her, attention on the newspaper beneath his hands. "Couldn't make the rent, you wanna know."

"Moved out where?" Susin said sharply.

"How should I know?" He leaned forward over the counter. "You're the one lives out on the beach, right? He your boyfriend or something?" and he grinned, started to laugh a little. "Is that right?"

She pushed hard at the door, careless of its heavy glass slam, felt rain on her face. The sky was starting to crack, a slick sullen trench heavy with rain. She stared down the line of identical doors, number after number and none to show which had been his. Her heart was beating hard. She looked at the doors again.

And saw him, shiny something in his hand, peering around a door marked 16. Her heart beat harder still, she smiled, walked fast and faster to his door. "They said you were gone," she said, and the rain started in full, deep drape of water in unbroken lines from top to bottom, sky to ground. It fell so hard it leaped up again with impact, and he put one hand on her arm and tugged her inside.

His room—he had made it a lair: covered as if by shed skins, drawings everywhere. Some pictures on the wall, not his, cheaply-framed prints of bland seaside oils, but even these transformed by the hand of his art: a sheet of colored plastic taped over one, changing it to cool sepia, a string of glittering broken rosary beads, gull feathers, and two blood-red plastic roses adorned the other. On the table lamp, an incongruous false sheaf of hair, curled like a question mark and tied with a bow. A scatter of cassettes beside a K-mart tape player, beside them a pile of creased paperbacks, and in the center of the stained bedspread two plastic IGA sacks jumbled with clothing, the torn sleeve of a windbreaker hanging

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out as if exhausted. He pushed the bags aside, sat, gathered into his lap his old leather portfolio, his hands stroking it as if it were a mistreated dog. "I'm supposed to be out by now," he said, glancing at the rain past the half-pulled curtains, "but I don't want to go in this."

She sat beside him, smelling the faint musk of his skin, echoed by the scent of the sheets. "Where are you going?" Her voice came out higher than normal, fiercely casual. His feet were bare, and she saw a long fresh cut on his instep.

Shrugging, not answering, his hands paint-scarred and gentle on the portfolio, and Susin said, her voice higher still, tight in her throat, "Come stay with me. Until you find another place."

His hands stilled. Very slowly he looked at her, eyes blue and calm and full on hers, and he smiled. "I'd like that," he said.

"Well, then let's get going," and nervously she started packing, piling up the paperbacks and tapes, taking the embellishments from the dreary pictures. She did not want to think of what Poole might say. Or do. What else could I *do*, she argued with his image, I can't just let him go, out in the rain.

On the drive there, streets already starting to eddy and worse as they drew closer to the beach, he spoke a little, saying that he was thankful, saying other things that she could not hear. The closer she got to the cottage, to Poole, the faster her heart beat, a long sustained gallop that was almost painful. A sharp wet smell rose from under her arms. She pulled up close beside the cottage, spoke without looking at Robin.

"I'll be out in a minute. Just wait here, all right? Wait in the car," and she pushed open the door, ran to the cottage through the cold blow of rain. Her hair hung half in her face, and her hands shook on the wet key.

"Poole!" she called. "Poole, I have to talk to you. Poole?" tracking through the cottage, empty kitchen, empty sleeping bag. Her sneakers made small wet sounds on the bare floors. "Poole—"

"Someone *else* is here."

He came up from nowhere, stood before her in the hallway like an apparition, absolutely still. There was no expression in his eyes, no clue in his color, dun. He had never, not even from the first, seemed as alien as this.

"Poole—"

Nothing: no flicker, no shine, no pulse of dividing pupils. Thunder outside.

"Poole, I would never have brought him if I didn't think it was safe, safe for you." Lie. She had *not* thought, not of Poole, before asking, only that Robin would be gone, only how to stop that from happening. "He won't tell anyone, I swear it."

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Poole's voice, low vibration, strange clicking sounds, anger? distress? between the words. "I was once before found this way and it was hard—" A sound she had never heard before; it swept gooseflesh down her skin, more as his long mouth opened and his two tongues fluttered to be still, to make the sounds that she could understand. He could barely speak, now, for agitation; the only word she could make out was "hurt."

Firmly, as strongly as she could with her shaking voice, her trembling hands: "I will never let him hurt you, Poole, never."

He passed her, slipping into the kitchen, going, she knew, to his pantry-retreat, hiding there, and a tenderness rose in her, almost maternal in its ferocity, and a great ache of fear for what she had done. What *had* she done? Slowly, as if through unfamiliar territory, she went back out, slowly through the rain as if she could not feel it slapping her skin, matting her hair. She took her seat behind the wheel and turned to face Robin with that same abstracted slowness.

"Before we go in," she said, "I have to tell you something."

She did it just that baldly, the fact of Poole's presence, what he was, how he had come. She told it in less than ten sentences, short sharp words in a dry voice, and sat back to see what he would do. Her heart pounded so terribly the blood was like pain in her ears.

Robin said nothing. Head bent, he considered his feet, picked at a loose seam on his cutoffs. "I don't care if you believe me or not," Susin said, her voice unraveling, "I don't *care* what—"

"Susin," very softly, almost shy. "Do you think . . . do you think he would let me talk to him?"

"I can ask." Was he humoring her? There was no way to tell. They left the bags where they were and went inside, the door slamming loud in the utter quiet of the cottage. "Poole," Susin called, "Robin wants to talk to you, please. *Please*, Poole."

Picking his way, steppingstone walk, Robin headed for the kitchen, obeying Susin's directing nod. She stood in the living room, hands pressed together against her stomach, feeling a rising pocket of sickness there. Should she go with him? He was in the kitchen now, she could hear him saying Poole's name, not in a tone stretched and trembling like hers, but in a quiet respectful way, his drawl softer somehow, pliable as wax.

Poole's answering sound made her start, guttural, half a groan, and then Robin's voice again, startled and pleased: "*I* painted that!" More sounds from Poole. Robin's answer, indistinct, and then something she had not heard before: Robin's laugh, deeper than his voice, deep with delight. "Oh!" she heard him cry, "oh yeah!" and another laugh, and cautiously she went to the kitchen, went to stand by the pantry door.

To see Robin, face alight, eyes filled with the color of Poole, who was showing in a fanlike spread the colors of Robin's picture, more beautiful

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than it, more beautiful than human skill could reproduce. "*Oh*," Robin said again, and tears came from his eyes to shine like rain on his cheeks.

She leaned back against the pantry door, relief so strong it made her feel sick, her muscles stringy and weak. Neither looked at her. Poole's colors pulsed and rose, and Robin watched, wept, smiled. Some time later, she stepped back from the door, shivering, then, with reaction, tears in her own eyes, but neither glanced her way, or watched her as she left the cottage to collect the bags.

Robin's studio, they called it: the half of the kitchen abutting the pantry, easel and papers and the smell of chalk dust and paint, richer than the odor of food. The table and two mismatched chairs were pushed into a corner to make room, the meager counters crowded, but Susin was so happy she would have torn down the house if they had suggested it. Them both, and together, and she between them, it was so much more than she had ever hoped for. Some nights she lay awake, simply smiling into the dark, hearing the faint sounds of Robin, breathing in dreams on the couch, and the voiceless murmurs of Poole in his sleeping bag nest. Rich, she was rich, she was immensely full.

All Robin's work, now, was of Poole: not his shape, or the physical; but his *colors*, living palette, constantly changing, whisper or glory or muted gleam, stopping only for Poole to rest. Robin was very strict: Poole must not be overtaxed, Poole must have everything just the way he liked it.

"God, you're something, you know?" he would say, hands busy, eyes full of color, and Poole would answer not in words but in a hum, a sweet foreign sound that Susin had not heard before.

"What's that, Poole?" she asked, and Robin said, "It's like his, his purr. Didn't you know that?" and Susin had smiled and shook her head. Poole's purr.

Robin was almost as unobtrusive a roommate as Poole, clean as a cat and tidy, rolling up his bedclothes every morning, using one coffee cup all day long. Susin cooked for everyone, an easy job since no one but she ever seemed to be hungry: too busy, Robin would say, patting her back, her shoulder. Later, 'kay? Later would come, and she, yawning, would climb into bed to the counterpoint of their quiet conversation and the paint's perfume. They had quickly developed a work language, a kind of artist's patois, augmented by gestures. One morning Susin saw Robin bend and dip his head gracefully, like a bird, twice, and Poole repeated the gesture twice, and, intrigued, she asked what they were doing.

"It's a way of," Robin at a loss, circling motion of his hand as if to say I know but I can't explain, "a way of saying, like, I understand, or I know what you mean." Poole made a tiny crow and Robin laughed, and Susin laughed too, bewildered. She stayed watching for a few more minutes,

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but neither turned to her, spoke in any sort of gesture, and finally she wandered away.

One night she woke to hear tiny sounds, soft and distressful, and, frightened, she slipped out of bed, hurried on cold feet to the kitchen. In Poole's pantry, he lay curled in a painful circle, and Robin sat beside him, stroking the sorrowful bluish body, crooning half-song, half-words, his voice very deep.

"What's wrong?" Susin said sharply, and Robin hushed her just as sharply.

"Don't talk so loud!" and then, even more quietly, "He's upset. He's homesick."

"Homesick?"

"Well," and beneath the drawl a slight disbelief at her wonder, "wouldn't *you* be? He's awful far from home," and again the croon, like a lullaby, over and over, until the blue skin washed to lavender and the eyes emptied and closed. In the living room, as Robin crawled wearily onto the couch, pulling up his blankets, Susin paused, arms crossed over her breasts, looking down at him.

"How did you know he was homesick?"

"How could I not know?" Robin sighed, rubbed his eyes. "Listen, we talk a lot, when we're working—"

"Yes," more pointedly than she had intended, "I've noticed."

"Well then." Rubbing his eyes, and a big pink yawn. "You see how it is."

I see how it is, she thought, walking the dark hall back to bed. It might be nice if you'd see a few things, too.

The mornings chilled, the nights were filled with long winds and the whisper of the moving sand. Susin took her ceremonial last swim of the summer, pulling strongly through the gray-blue water that echoed the long empty sweep of the sky. She came out shivering, running back to the cottage and warmth, pushed open the door to a quality of silence she had not heard before. Soft and careful, into the kitchen, and, unimaginable, a color she could not believe, an intensity she could not fathom, and Robin, rapt, working hard and rapidly, trying to blend an approximate, and she stood as rapt and watched, stood dripping and cold for almost an hour. Finally her trembling recalled her to herself, she left for a towel, rubbed herself dry.

"—like it?" Robin was saying; she edged her door open and stood beside it, listening. "It's your real color, isn't it? The color you really are."

Poole made a murmur, then, "My color," with a wistfulness so acute that Susin's breath caught, snagged on a pain in her throat. "Where I was, there are so many, many colors. I wish I could show them to you."

"I wish," with equal longing, "that I could see them."

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Slowly, she closed the door. She sat on her bed for a long time, past dinner, into dark. The sounds from the kitchen ceased, she heard Robin, yawning, call his goodnight, move into the living room. All her motions deliberate, she undressed, walked silently into the living room, stood in the dark above him. "Robin," she said, very quietly.

"Mmm?" half-asleep already; they must have worked very hard tonight. He pushed himself half-upright, then sat very straight and still when he saw her. "Susin?" like a question, his face half turned from the paleness of her, the warmth of her body displayed. "What—"

"It's cold out here," she said softly. Her hands were very cold, loose at her sides, palms turned in. "Why don't you come in my room."

Silence. It almost seemed he would reach for her, rise to take what she offered; in the lines of his body he spoke without speaking, but then did speak, saying gently, "Susin—no, honey. I don't think—"

Now the cold crept up her arms, into her chest, making it hard to talk. "You don't think what?"

"I just don't think it's a good idea." He ran his hands over his face, pulling at the skin, pushing back his hair. "Don't be mad, Susin, please. Okay? Will you please not—"

"No," she said, and turned as the cold seeped through to her stomach, lay like lead in her thighs, "no," as she walked, very slowly, back to her room, as slowly shut the door until it clicked, a small and final sound.

The next day, she rose late, stayed late in her room to emerge in the midafternoon, bright, brisk as if nothing had happened, but with an edge to her smile. Poole sat silently, his gaze following Susin as she moved around the room. After a few long minutes, he went into his pantry and shut the door, something he had not done since Robin moved in.

"What's the matter?" Susin asked Robin, thumb pointed at Poole's door. Robin shook his head, and Susin laughed, a short little laugh. "Don't you know?"

"No," steadily, "I don't. But what I think is, he's upset because *you're* upset."

"Well, that *is* thoughtful. But I'm not upset." She left the kitchen, the cottage, and began to walk, feet digging deep into the wettish sand, grinding it with her passage, arms swinging like a soldier, aiming for the pointed yellow roof of the restaurant far down at the public beach. Smaller than a caret at this distance, but two hours' hard walking would get her there.

Her jeans were wet to the calf when she got there, her sneakers clumsy with sand. It was early dinner hour, there were no seats in the dining area. Would she care to take a seat at the bar? She would. She did not know what to order. The man next to her asked for a screwdriver, and she did too.

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She was thirsty from her long walk. The drink tasted all right, faintly sour, but the juice was kind to her empty stomach. She studied the tiny clinging pulp on the sides of the glass. The bar end of the restaurant directly fronted the lake, and from where she sat she could watch the gathering of long clouds, a bleak smear of darkening bluish-gray. Maybe Robin was out painting it, right now. Maybe a storm would come and blow him into the lake, and Poole too, the fucking ingrate.

The man next to her left. She ordered another drink. She was unaccustomed to drinking, and was briefly surprised that she did not feel more from the first screwdriver. The waitress told her there was a table available in the dining room; no thanks, Susin said. Not right now.

The bar was filling up. Two men, young men, loud, came in, scanned the row of stools. They sat, deliberately casual, on either side of Susin. She recognized one, vaguely, the other not at all. They both smelled like beer.

"Gettin' cold out there," the one on her right said. "Temperature's droppin' like a stone." He touched her glass with one short finger. "What're you drinking there? Isn't your name Susan?"

"Yes, it is," she said, with vast warm dignity. She remembered him now. "You work at the gas station," she told him. "In the booth."

"That's right," he agreed, grinning as if she had just told a particularly clever joke. "Takin' money, day in and day out."

"But not today," the one on her left said, and they both laughed.

A bright bayonet of lightning, and coughing thunder; Susin jumped at the flash, and the two flanking her laughed again. "Don't be scared, Susan," said the one on her right.

She noticed her glass was almost empty. "Why don't I buy you a drink?" the one on the right said. Susin felt a snicker bubbling up inside; it felt hot, and barbed.

"Go ahead," she said.

It rained, through sundown and into dark. Susin never made it into the dining room. Instead, she sat with Mike and Danny, her two new friends, chuckling in small mean bursts, laughing not at their jokes but at what they thought was humor. The drinks had begun to blossom, and the cold inside, while not melting, was at least starting to fray.

Mike, on her right, was winding up a story about his landlord: " 'n so I told him, why don't you send me a fuckin' *bill?*" and he crowed a laugh, and Danny laughed too. Susin did not laugh. "Hey," Mike said. "For what he's charging me, he can afford to eat a little shit."

"I don't have that problem." More thunder, heavy rumble like a drumful of boulders. It seemed painfully loud.

"Yeah, you live in that beach house, don't you?" They both leaned toward her, as if excessively interested. "All by yourself?"

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Susin laughed then, a bray that startled all three of them. "I have," she said, when the laugh was past, "a friend staying with me now." They teased her: Friend, huh? What kind of friend? The real good kind?

"No," she said. "Just somebody I know."

"He from around here, maybe?" nudging each other, grinning. Three more drinks fresh and slippery on the bar before them.

"No, he's not." Her voice was loud, peculiar in her ears. "He's from very very *very* far away. Farther than you've ever been."

"Is that right?" elaborate courtesy, both of them suppressing smiles. "Maybe he's E.T.," said Danny, and he and Mike laughed, loud beery whoops.

Susin did not laugh, but smiled, an ugly little motion. "Maybe he is," she said.

When her drink was done she pushed off the stool, distantly startled by the looseness of her muscles. Her bones felt like wire. "I'm going home now," she said. "Thanks for the drinks."

Mike pointed to the rain, increasing now, its force beginning to churn the water. "Why don't you wait for the rain to stop?" With great cunning, he slipped an arm around Susin's shoulders. "Too bad to drive right now."

Susin's cheeks turned red, a dull color. "I didn't drive," she said sullenly. "I walked."

"Walked!" She couldn't walk back in *this*, they said, fumbling for keys, slurping up the dregs of foam, no kind of weather for walking! They would drive her home. She slipped out of Mike's hold; he smiled behind her back at Danny, thought she did not see, but she did. She saw everything. "All right," she said, slowly. "Let's go."

Crammed into the front seat, thighs mashed between them, she felt her heart, brightly pounding, thump thump, but so cold. One of the windshield wipers was broken. She watched its crooked arc, back and forth, thump thump. Something, like nausea but not, curled in her belly, and it too was very cold.

The makeshift drive beside the house was thickly puddled, and empty. *Empty*, Susin thought, and said, in a dull cold voice, "My car's gone."

"Maybe your boyfriend took it," Danny said.

"Drove it back to Mars," Mike added, and they both laughed, a tandem sound like two trained dogs.

"My car's gone," Susin said again, louder this time, and louder still, "My fucking *car's* gone! I'll call the police!" The last word seemed somehow too big for the car, and suddenly Mike and Danny seemed very uneasy. She did not hear, did not listen to what they said, only sat in a cold circle of rage until Mike said, "Listen Susan, we'll see you later, okay? Okay?" as Danny opened the passenger door, hopped out to let her exit, impatient in the downpour. As he slipped past her to get back in,

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she heard Mike's voice, indistinct: "—one DUI already." The car sprayed her, lightly, with water and gravel as it backed up, but she did not turn, kept walking, up the porch, jammed the key and had to try again.

As soon as the door was open, she cried, "Poole!" and, without waiting, aimed for the kitchen, her walk ragged, her heart pounding now a different way. She fumbled at the pantry door, pulled it open too hard, almost lost her balance. "*Poole!*"

His nest was empty.

"Poole Poole Poole," screaming it through the house, "Poole *Poole!*" kicking newspapers, ripping at bedclothes, slamming doors open and then shut. She looked everywhere, places absurd in their size, places he could not possibly be, ended back at the pantry. "Poole!" She clawed the thin chain, jerked on the light.

Robin's picture was gone.

Clumsy pivot, staring around the kitchen: the easel was gone, the supplies, but not all, a hurried job of packing. Robin's windbreaker, still limp on a chairback. Some sketches still magnetted to the refrigerator. She leaned against the pantry door, the cold melting now, running in the heat of her sickness, the hard gurgling feel of nausea as she ran to the sink, tears in her eyes. How did they know, how did they *know*, better than she, and faster, what she was capable of doing? She vomited, a loud ugly blurt of sound in the silent house, then stood, crying silently, hands on either side of the sink. *Had* they known, or only feared, choosing the danger of flight as the lesser fear? She would never know, now.

She was sick for a long time. She thought dimly she might never stop being sick.

She never called the police. They called her.

"The computer lists the VIN number on your registration," the officer said, her voice very brisk. "The car was found in—" pause "—Buckman."

Buckman, ninety miles north. From there, where? Anywhere.

When Susin did not speak, the officer spoke again. "The car's not damaged. According to the report, there's even a little gas in the tank." Pause. Uncomfortable with Susin's silence: "The police in Buckman found the car empty. Do you have any idea who might have taken it?"

Susin closed her eyes. "No," she said. "No, I don't."

The wind had risen, and the screen door was banging, a rhythmic gentle sound. Susin locked it, leaning for a moment into the cold wind. After a moment, she shut the door, and went into the pantry to gather up the sleeping bag and blankets.

She would need them now. ●

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THE CARESS

by Greg Egan

Greg Egan works as a computer programmer in the Medicine Physics Department of a hospital in his native city—Perth, Australia. His fiction has appeared in *Interzone*, *The Year's Best Horror Stories XVI*, and a number of Australian anthologies. Mr. Egan's stories are also forthcoming in *The Year's Best Fantasy* and in *Analog*.

art: Janet Aulisio

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Two smells hit me when I kicked down the door: death, and the scent of an animal.

A man who passed the house each day had phoned us, anonymously; worried by the sight of a broken window left unrepaired, he'd knocked on the front door with no results. On his way to the back door, he'd glimpsed blood on a kitchen wall through a gap in the curtains.

The place had been ransacked; all that remained downstairs were the drag marks on the carpet from the heaviest furniture. The woman in the kitchen, mid fifties, throat slit, had been dead for at least a week.

My helmet was filing sound and vision, but it couldn't record the animal smell. The correct procedure was to make a verbal comment, but I didn't say a word. Why? Call it a vestigial need for independence. Soon they'll be logging our brain waves, our heart beats, who knows what, and all of it subpoenable. "Detective Segel, the evidence shows that you experienced a penile erection when the defendant opened fire. Would you describe that as an *appropriate* response?"

Upstairs was a mess. Clothes scattered in the bedroom. Books, CDs, papers, upturned drawers, spread across the floor of the study. Medical texts. In one corner, piles of CD periodicals stood out from the jumble by their jackets' uniformity: *The New England Journal of Medicine, Nature, Clinical Biochemistry* and *Laboratory Embryology*. A framed scroll hung on the wall, awarding the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to Freda Anne Macklenburg in the year two thousand and twenty-three. The desktop had dust-free spaces shaped like a monitor and a keyboard. I noticed a wall outlet with a pilot light; the switch was down but the light was dead. The room light wasn't working; ditto elsewhere.

Back on the ground floor, I found a door behind the stairs, presumably leading to a basement. Locked. I hesitated. Entering the house I'd had no choice but to force my way in; here, though, I was on shakier legal ground. I hadn't searched thoroughly for keys, and I had no clear reason to believe it was urgent to get into the basement.

But what would one more broken door change? Cops have been sued for failing to wipe their boots clean on the doormat. If a citizen wants to screw you, they'll find a reason, even if you came in on your knees, waving a handful of warrants, and saved their whole family from torture and death.

No room to kick, so I punched out the lock. The smell had me gagging, but it was the excess, the concentration, that was overwhelming; the scent in itself wasn't foul. Upstairs, seeing medical books, I'd thought of guinea pigs, rats and mice, but this was no stink of caged rodents.

I switched on the torch in my helmet and moved quickly down the narrow concrete steps. Over my head was a thick, square pipe. An air-

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conditioning duct? That made sense; the house couldn't *normally* smell the way it did, but with the power cut off to a basement air conditioner—

The torch beam showed a shelving unit, decorated with trinkets and potted plants. A TV set. Landscape paintings on the wall. A pile of straw on the concrete floor. Curled on the straw, the powerful body of a leopard, lungs visibly laboring, but otherwise still.

When the beam fell upon a tangle of auburn hair, I thought, it's chewing on a severed human head. I continued to approach, expecting, hoping, that by disturbing the feeding animal I could provoke it into attacking me. I was carrying a weapon that could have spattered it into a fine mist of blood and gristle, an outcome which would have involved me in a great deal less tedium and bureaucracy than dealing with it alive. I directed the light toward its head again, and realized that I'd been mistaken; it wasn't chewing anything, its head was hidden, tucked away, and the human head was simply—

Wrong again. The human head was simply joined to the leopard's body. Its human neck took on fur and spots and merged with the leopard's shoulders.

I squatted down beside it, thinking, above all else, what those claws could do to me if my attention lapsed. The head was a woman's. Frowning. Apparently asleep. I placed one hand below her nostrils, and felt the air blast out in time with the heavings of the leopard's great chest. That, more than the smooth transition of the skin, made the union real for me.

I explored the rest of the room. There was a pit in one corner that turned out to be a toilet bowl sunk into the floor. I put my foot on a nearby pedal, and the bowl flushed from a hidden cistern. There was an upright freezer, standing in a puddle of water. I opened it to find a rack containing thirty-five small plastic vials. Every one of them bore smeared red letters, spelling out the word SPOILED. Temperature sensitive dye.

I returned to the leopard woman. Asleep? Feigning sleep? Sick? Comatose? I patted her on the cheek, and not gently. The skin seemed hot, but I had no idea what her temperature ought to be. I shook her by one shoulder, this time with a little more respect, as if waking her by touching the leopard part might somehow be more dangerous. No effect.

Then I stood up, fought back a sigh of irritation (Psych latch on to all your little noises; I've been grilled for hours over such things as an injudicious whoop of triumph), and called for an ambulance.

I should have known better than to hope that *that* would be the end of my problems. I had to physically obstruct the stairway to stop the ambulance men from retreating. One of them puked. Then they refused to put her on the stretcher unless I promised to ride with her to the hospital. She was only about two meters long, excluding the tail, but

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must have weighed a hundred and fifty kilos, and it took the three of us to get her up the awkward stairs.

We covered her completely with a sheet before leaving the house, and I took the trouble to arrange it to keep it from revealing the shape beneath. A small crowd had gathered outside, the usual motley collection of voyeurs. The forensic team arrived just then, but I'd already told them everything by radio.

At the Casualty Department of St Dominic's, doctor after doctor took one look under the sheet and then fled, some muttering half-baked excuses, most not bothering. I was about to lose my temper when the fifth one I cornered, a young woman, turned pale but kept her ground. After poking and pinching and shining a torch into the leopard woman's forced-open eyes, Dr. Muriel Beatty (from her name badge) announced, "She's in a coma," and started extracting details from me. When I'd told her everything, I squeezed in some questions of my own.

"How would someone do this? Gene splicing? Transplant surgery?"

"I doubt it was either. More likely she's a chimera."

I frowned. "That's some kind of mythical—"

"Yes, but it's also a bioengineering term. You can physically mix the cells of two genetically distinct early embryos, and obtain a blastocyst that will develop into a single organism. If they're both of the same species, there's a very high success rate; for different species it's trickier. People made crude sheep/goat chimeras as far back as the nineteen sixties, but I've read nothing new on the subject for five or ten years. I would have said it was no longer being seriously pursued. Let alone pursued with humans." She stared down at her patient with unease and fascination. "I wouldn't know how they guaranteed such a sharp distinction between the head and the body; a thousand times more effort has gone into *this* than just stirring two clumps of cells together. I guess you could say it was something half-way between fetal transplant surgery and chimerization. And there must have been genetic manipulation as well, to smooth out the biochemical differences." She laughed drily. "So both your suggestions I dismissed just then were probably partly right. *Of course!*"

"What?"

"No wonder she's in a coma! That freezer full of vials you mentioned—she probably needs an external supply for half a dozen hormones that are insufficiently active across species. Can I arrange for someone to go to the house and look through the dead woman's papers? We need to know exactly what those vials contained. Even if she made it up herself from off-the-shelf sources, we might be able to find the recipe—but chances are she had a contract with a biotechnology company for a regular, pre-mixed supply. So if we can find, say, an invoice with a product

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reference number, that would be the quickest, surest way to get this patient what she needs to stay alive."

I agreed, and accompanied a lab technician back to the house, but he found nothing of use in the study, or the basement. After talking it over with Muriel Beatty on the phone, I started ringing local biotech companies, quoting the deceased woman's name and address. Several people said they'd heard of Dr. Macklenburg, but not as a customer. The fifteenth call produced results—deliveries for a company called Applied Veterinary Research had been sent to Macklenburg's address—and with a combination of threats and smooth talking (such as inventing an order number they could quote on their invoice), I managed to extract a promise that a batch of the "Applied Veterinary Research" preparation would be made up at once and rushed to St Dominic's.

Burglars *do* switch off the power sometimes, in the hope of disabling those (very rare) security devices that don't have battery back-up, but the house hadn't been broken into; the scattered glass from the window fell, in an undisturbed pattern, onto carpet where a sofa had left clear indentations. The fools had forgotten to break a window until after they'd taken the furniture. People *do* throw out invoices, but Macklenburg had kept all her videophone, water, gas, and electricity bills for the last five years. So, it looked like somebody had known about the chimera and wanted it dead, without wishing to be totally obvious, yet without being professional enough to manage anything subtler, or more certain.

I arranged for the chimera to be guarded. Probably a good idea anyway, to keep the media at bay when they found out about her.

Back in my office, I did a search of medical literature by Macklenburg, and found her name on only half a dozen papers. All were more than twenty years old. All were concerned with embryology, though (to the extent that I could understand the jargon-laden abstracts, full of "zonae pellucidae" and "polar bodies") none were explicitly about chimeras.

The papers were all from one place; the Early Human Development Laboratory at St Andrew's Hospital. After some standard brush-offs from secretaries and assistants, I managed to get myself put through to one of Macklenburg's one time co-authors, a Dr. Henry Feingold, who looked rather old and frail. News of Macklenburg's death produced a wistful sigh, but no visible shock or distress.

"Freda left us back in '32 or '33. I've hardly set eyes on her since, except at the occasional conference."

"Where did she go to from St Andrew's?"

"Something in industry. She was rather vague about it. I'm not sure that she had a definite appointment lined up."

"Why did she resign?"

He shrugged. "Sick of the conditions here. Low pay, limited resources,

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bureaucratic restrictions, ethics committees. Some people learn to live with all that, some don't."

"Would you know anything about her work, her particular research interests, after she left?"

"I don't know that she *did* much research. She seemed to have stopped publishing, so I really couldn't say what she was up to."

Shortly after that (with unusual speed), clearance came through to access her taxation records. Since '35 she had been self-employed as a "freelance biotechnology consultant"; whatever that meant, it had provided her with a seven-figure income for the past fifteen years. There were at least a hundred different company names listed by her as sources of revenue. I rang the first one and found myself talking to an answering machine. It was after seven. I rang St Dominic's, and learnt that the chimera was still unconscious, but doing fine; the hormone mixture had arrived, and Muriel Beatty had located a veterinarian at the university with some relevant experience. So I swallowed my deprimers and went home.

The surest sign that I'm not fully down is the frustration I feel when opening my own front door. It's too bland, too easy: inserting three keys and touching my thumb to the scanner. Nothing inside is going to be dangerous or challenging. The deprimers are meant to work in five minutes. Some nights it's more like five hours.

Marion was watching TV, and called out, "Hi Dan."

I stood in the living room doorway. "Hi. How was your day?" She works in a child care center, which is my idea of a high-stress occupation. She shrugged. "Ordinary. How was yours?"

Something on the TV screen caught my eye. I swore for about a minute, mostly cursing a certain communications officer who I knew was responsible, though I couldn't have proved it. "How was my day? You're looking at it." The TV was showing part of my helmet log; the basement, my discovery of the chimera.

Marion said, "Ah. I was going to ask if you knew who the cop was."

"And you know what I'll be doing tomorrow? Trying to make sense of a few thousand phone calls from people who've seen this and decided they have something useful to say about it."

"That poor girl. Is she going to be okay?"

"I think so."

They played Muriel Beatty's speculations, again from my point of view, then cut to a couple of pocket experts who debated the fine points of chimerism while an interviewer did his best to drag in spurious references to everything from Greek mythology to *The Island of Doctor Moreau*.

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I said, "I'm starving. Let's eat."

I woke at half past one, shaking and whimpering. Marion was already awake, trying to calm me down. Lately I'd been suffering a lot from delayed reactions like this. A few months earlier, two nights after a particularly brutal assault case, I'd been distraught and incoherent for hours.

On duty, we are what's called "primed." A mixture of drugs heightens various physiological and emotional responses, and suppresses others. Sharpens our reflexes. Keeps us calm and rational. Supposedly improves our judgment. (The media like to say that the drugs make us more aggressive, but that's garbage; why would the force intentionally create trigger-happy cops? Swift decisions and swift actions are the *opposite* of dumb brutality.)

Off duty, we are "deprimed." That's meant to make us the way we would be if we'd never taken the priming drugs. (A hazy concept, I have to admit. As if we'd never taken the priming drugs, *and* never spent the day at work? Or, as if we'd seen and done the very same things, without the primers to help us cope?)

Sometimes this seesaw works smoothly. Sometimes it fucks up.

I wanted to describe to Marion how I felt about the chimera. I wanted to talk about my fear and revulsion and pity and anger. All I could do was make unhappy noises. No words. She didn't say anything, she just held me, her long fingers cool on the burning skin of my face and chest.

When I finally exhausted myself into something approaching peace, I managed to speak. I whispered, "Why do you stay with me? Why do you put up with this?"

She turned away from me and said, "I'm tired. Go to sleep."

I enrolled for the force at the age of twelve. I continued my normal education, but that's when you have to start the course of growth factor injections, and weekend and vacation training, if you want to qualify for active duty. (It wasn't an irreversible obligation; I could have chosen a different career later, and paid off what had been invested in me at a hundred dollars or so a week over the next thirty years. Or, I could have failed the psychological tests, and been dropped without owing a cent. The tests before you even begin, however, tend to weed out anyone who's likely to do either.) It makes sense; rather than limiting recruitment to men and women meeting certain physical criteria, candidates are chosen according to intelligence and attitude, and then the secondary, but useful, characteristics of size, strength, and agility, are provided artificially.

So we're freaks, constructed and conditioned to meet the demands of the job. Less so than soldiers or professional athletes. Far less so than

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the average street gang member, who thinks nothing of using illegal growth promoters that lower his life expectancy to around thirty years. Who, unarmed but on a mixture of Berserker and Timewarp (oblivious to pain and most physical trauma and with a twenty-fold decrease in reaction times), can kill a hundred people in a crowd in five minutes, then vanish to a safe-house before the high ends and the fortnight of side effects begins. (A certain politician, a very popular man, advocates undercover operations to sell supplies of these drugs laced with fatal impurities, but he's not yet succeeded in making that legal.)

Yes, we're freaks; but if we have a problem, it's that we're still far too human.

When over a hundred thousand people phone in about an investigation, there's only one way to deal with their calls. It's called ARIA: Automated Remote Informant Analysis.

An initial filtering process identifies the blatantly obvious pranksters and lunatics. It's always *possible* that someone who phones in and spends ninety percent of their time ranting about UFOs, or communist conspiracies, or slicing up our genitals with razor blades, has something relevant and truthful to mention in passing, but it seems reasonable to give their evidence less weight than that of someone who sticks to the point. More sophisticated analysis of gestures (about thirty percent of callers don't switch off the vision), and speech patterns, supposedly picks up anyone who is, although superficially rational and apposite, actually suffering from psychotic delusions or fixations. Ultimately, each caller is given a "reliability factor" between zero and one, with the benefit of the doubt going to anyone who betrays no recognizable signs of dishonesty or mental illness. Some days I'm impressed with the sophistication of the software that makes these assessments. Other days I curse it as a heap of useless voodoo.

The relevant assertions (broadly defined) of each caller are extracted, and a frequency table is created, giving a count of the number of callers making each assertion, and their average reliability factor. Unfortunately, there are no simple rules to determine which assertions are most likely to be *true*. One thousand people might earnestly repeat a widespread but totally baseless rumor. A single honest witness might be distraught, or chemically screwed-up, and be given an unfairly poor rating. Basically, you have to read all the assertions—which is tedious, but still several thousand times faster than viewing every call.

001.	The chimera is a Martian.	15312	0.37
002.	The chimera is from a UFO.	14106	0.29
003.	The chimera is from Atlantis.	9003	0.24

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004.	The chimera is a mutant.	8973	0.41
005.	The chimera resulted from human-leopard sexual intercourse.	6884	0.13
006.	The chimera is a sign from God.	2654	0.09
007.	The chimera is the Antichrist.	2432	0.07
008.	Caller is the chimera's father.	2390	0.12
009.	The chimera is a Greek deity.	1345	0.10
010.	Caller is the chimera's mother.	1156	0.09
011.	The chimera should be killed by authorities.	1009	0.19
012.	Caller has previously seen the chimera in their neighborhood.	988	0.39
013.	The chimera killed Freda Macklenburg.	945	0.24
014.	Caller intends killing the chimera.	903	0.49
015.	Caller killed Freda Macklenburg.	830	0.27

(If desperate, I could view, one by one, the seventeen hundred and thirty-three calls of items 14 and 15. Not yet, though; I still had plenty of better ways to spend my time.)

016.	The chimera was created by a foreign government.	724	0.18
017.	The chimera is the result of biological warfare.	690	0.14
018.	The chimera is a were-leopard.	604	0.09
019.	Caller wishes to have sexual intercourse with the chimera.	582	0.58
020.	Caller has previously seen a painting of the chimera.	527	0.89

That was hardly surprising, considering the number of paintings there must be of fantastic and mythical creatures. But on the next page:

034.	The chimera closely resembles the creature portrayed in a painting entitled *The Caress.*	94	0.92

Curious, I displayed some of the calls. The first few told me little more than the printout's summary line. Then, one man held up an open book to the lens. The glare of a light bulb reflected off the glossy paper rendered parts of it almost invisible, and the whole thing was slightly out of focus, but what I could see was intriguing.

A leopard with a woman's head was crouched near the edge of a raised,

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flat surface. A slender young man, bare to the waist, stood on the lower ground, leaning sideways onto the raised surface, cheek to cheek with the leopard woman, who pressed one forepaw against his abdomen in an awkward embrace. The man coolly gazed straight ahead, his mouth set primly, giving an impression of effete detachment. The woman's eyes were closed, or nearly so, and her expression seemed less certain the longer I stared—it might have been placid, dreamy contentment, it might have been erotic bliss. Both had auburn hair.

I selected a rectangle around the woman's face, enlarged it to fill the screen, then applied a smoothing option to make the blown-up pixels less distracting. With the glare, the poor focus, and limited resolution, the image was a mess. The best I could say was that the face in the painting was not wildly dissimilar to that of the woman I'd found in the basement.

A few dozen calls later, though, no doubt remained. One caller had even taken the trouble to capture a frame from the news broadcast and patch it into her call, side by side with a well-lit close-up of her copy of the painting. One view of a single expression does not define a human face, but the resemblance was far too close to be coincidental. Since—as many people told me, and I later checked for myself—*The Caress* had been painted in 1896 by the Belgian Symbolist artist Fernand Khnopff, the painting could not possibly have been based on the living chimera. So, it had to be the other way around.

I played all ninety-four calls. Most contained nothing but the same handful of simple facts about the painting. One went a little further.

A middle-aged man introduced himself as John Aldrich, art dealer and amateur art historian. After pointing out the resemblance, and talking briefly about Khnopff and *The Caress*, he added:

"Given that this poor woman looks exactly like Khnopff's sphinx, I wonder if you've considered the possibility that proponents of Lindhquistism are involved?" He blushed slightly. "Perhaps that's far-fetched, but I thought I should mention it."

So I called an on-line *Britannica*, and said "Lindhquistism."

Andreas Lindhquist, 1961–2030; was a Swiss performance artist, with the distinct financial advantage of being heir to a massive pharmaceuticals empire. Up until 2011, he engaged in a wide variety of activities of a bioartistic nature, progressing from generating sounds and images by computer processing of physiological signals (ECG, EEG, skin conductivity, hormonal levels continuously monitored by immunoelectric probes), to subjecting himself to surgery in a sterile, transparent cocoon in the middle of a packed auditorium, once to have his corneas gratuitously exchanged, left for right, and a second time to have them swapped back (he publicized a more ambitious version, in which he claimed every organ in his torso would be removed and reinserted facing backwards,

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but was unable to find a team of surgeons who considered this anatomically plausible).

In 2011, he developed a new obsession. He projected slides of classical paintings in which the figures had been blacked out, and had models in appropriate costumes and make-up strike poses in front of the screen, filling in the gaps.

Why? In his own words (or perhaps a translation):

The great artists are afforded glimpses into a separate, transcendental, timeless world. Does that world exist? Can we travel to it? No! We must force it into being around us! We must take these fragmentary glimpses and make them solid and tangible, make them live and breathe and walk amongst us, we must import art into reality, and by doing so transform *our world into the world of the artists' vision.*

I wondered what ARIA would have made of that.

Over the next ten years, he moved away from projected slides. He began hiring movie set designers and landscape architects to recreate in three dimensions the backgrounds of the paintings he chose. He discarded the use of make-up to alter the appearance of the models, and, when he found it impossible to find perfect lookalikes, he employed only those who, for sufficient payment, were willing to undergo cosmetic surgery.

His interest in biology hadn't entirely vanished; in 2021, on his sixtieth birthday, he had two tubes implanted in his skull, allowing him to constantly monitor, and alter, the precise neurochemical content of his brain ventricular fluid. After this, his requirements became even more stringent. The "cheating" techniques of movie sets were forbidden—a house, or a church, or a lake, or a mountain, glimpsed in the corner of the painting being "realized," had to *be there,* full scale and complete in every detail. Houses, churches, and small lakes were created; mountains he had to seek out—though he did transplant or destroy thousands of hectares of vegetation to alter their color and texture. His models were required to spend months before and after the "realization," scrupulously "living their roles," following complex rules and scenarios that Lindhquist devised, based on his interpretation of the painting's "characters." This aspect grew increasingly important to him:

The precise realization of the appearance—the surface, I call it, however three-dimensional—is only the most rudimentary beginning. It is the network of relationships between the subjects, and between the subjects and their setting, that constitutes the challenge for the generation that follows me.

At first, it struck me as astonishing that I'd never even heard of this maniac; his sheer extravagance must have earned him a certain notoriety. But there are millions of eccentrics in the world, and thousands

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of extremely wealthy ones—and I was only five when Lindhquist died of a heart attack in 2030, leaving his fortune to a nine-year-old son.

As for disciples, *Britannica* listed half a dozen scattered around Eastern Europe, where apparently he'd found the most respect. All seemed to have completely abandoned his excesses, offering volumes of aesthetic theories in support of the use of painted plywood and mime artists in stylized masks. In fact, most did just that—offered the volumes, and didn't even bother with the plywood and the mime artists. I couldn't imagine any of them having either the money or the inclination to sponsor embryological research thousands of kilometers away.

For obscure reasons of copyright law, works of visual art are rarely present in publicly accessible databases, so in my lunch hour I went out and bought a book on Symbolist painters which included a color plate of *The Caress*. I made a dozen (illegal) copies, blow-ups of various sizes. Curiously, in each one the expression of the sphinx (as Aldrich had called her) struck me as subtly different. Her mouth and her eyes (one fully closed, one infinitesimally open) could not be said to portray a definite smile, but the shading of the cheeks hinted at one—in certain enlargements, viewed from certain angles. The young man's face also changed, from vaguely troubled to slightly bored, from resolved to dissipated, from noble to effeminate. The features of both seemed to lie on complicated and uncertain borders between regions of definite mood, and the slightest shift in viewing conditions was enough to force a complete reinterpretation. If that had been Khnopff's intention it was a masterful achievement, but I also found it extremely frustrating. The book's brief commentary was no help, praising the painting's "perfectly balanced composition and delightful thematic ambiguity," and suggesting that the leopard's head was "perversely modeled on the artist's sister, with whose beauty he was constantly obsessed."

Unsure for the moment just how, if at all, I ought to pursue this strand of the investigation, I sat at my desk for several minutes, wondering (but not inclined to check) if every one of the leopard's spots shown in the painting had been reproduced faithfully *in vivo*. I wanted to do something tangible, set something in motion, before I put *The Caress* aside and returned to more routine lines of inquiry.

So I made one more blow-up of the painting, this time using the copier's editing facilities to surround the man's head and shoulders with a uniform dark background. I took it down to communications, and handed it to Steve Birbeck (the man I knew had leaked my helmet log to the media).

I said, "Put out an alert on this guy. Wanted for questioning in connection with the Macklenburg murder."

* * *

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I found nothing else of interest in the ARIA printout, so I picked up where I'd left off the night before, phoning companies that had made use of Freda Macklenburg's services.

The work she had done had no specific connection with embryology. Her advice and assistance seemed to have been sought for a wide range of unconnected problems in a dozen fields—tissue culture work, the use of retroviruses as gene-therapy vectors, cell membrane electrochemistry, protein purification, and still other areas where the vocabulary meant nothing to me at all.

"And did Dr. Macklenburg solve this problem?"

"Absolutely. She knew a perfect way around the stumbling block that had been holding us up for months."

"How did you find out about her?"

"There's a register of consultants, indexed by speciality."

There was indeed. She was in it in fifty-nine places. Either she somehow knew the detailed specifics of all these areas, better than many people who were actually working in them full-time, or she had access to world-class experts who could put the right words into her mouth.

Her sponsor's method of funding her work? Paying her not in money, but in expertise she could then sell as her own? Who would have so many biological scientists on tap?

The Lindhquist empire?

(So much for escaping *The Caress*.)

Her phone bills showed no long distance calls, but that meant nothing; the local Lindhquist branch would have had its own private international network.

I looked up Lindhquist's son Gustave in *Who's Who*. It was a very sketchy entry. Born to a surrogate mother. Donor ovum anonymous. Educated by tutors. As yet unmarried at twenty-nine. Reclusive. Apparently immersed in his business concerns. Not a word about artistic pretensions, but nobody tells everything to *Who's Who*.

The preliminary forensic report arrived, with nothing very useful. No evidence of a protracted struggle—no bruising, no skin or blood found under Macklenburg's fingernails. Apparently she'd been taken entirely by surprise. The throat wound had been made by a thin, straight, razor-sharp blade, with a single powerful stroke.

There were five genotypes, besides Macklenburg's and the chimera's, present in hairs and flakes of dead skin found in the house. Precise dating isn't possible, but all showed a broad range in the age of shedding, which meant regular visitors, friends, not strangers. All five had been in the kitchen at one time or another. Only Macklenburg and the chimera showed up in the basement in amounts that could not be accounted for by drift and second party transport, while the chimera seemed to have

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rarely left her special room. One prevalent male had been in most of the rest of the house, including the bedroom, but not the bed—or at least not since the sheets had last been changed. All of this was unlikely to have a direct bearing on the murder; the best assassins either leave no biological detritus at all, or plant material belonging to someone else.

The interviewers' report came in soon after, and that was even less helpful. Macklenburg's next of kin was a cousin, with whom she had not been in touch, and who knew even less about the dead woman than I did. Her neighbors were all much too respectful of privacy to have known or cared who her friends had been, and none would admit to having noticed anything unusual on the day of the murder.

I sat and stared at *The Caress*.

Some lunatic with a great deal of money—perhaps connected to Lindhquist, perhaps not—had commissioned Freda Macklenburg to create the chimera to match the sphinx in the painting. But who would want to fake a burglary, murder Macklenburg, and endanger the chimera's life, without making the effort to actually kill it?

The phone rang. It was Muriel. The chimera was awake.

The two officers outside had had a busy shift so far; one psycho with a knife, two photographers disguised as doctors, and a religious fanatic with a mail-order exorcism kit. The news reports hadn't mentioned the name of the hospital, but there were only a dozen plausible candidates, and the staff could not be sworn to secrecy or immunized against the effect of bribes. In a day or two, the chimera's location would be common knowledge. If things didn't quiet down, I'd have to consider trying to arrange for a room in a prison infirmary, or a military hospital.

"You saved my life."

The chimera's voice was deep and quiet and calm, and she looked right at me as she spoke. I'd expected her to be painfully shy, amongst strangers for perhaps the first time ever. She lay curled on her side on the bed, not covered by a sheet but with her head resting on a clean, white pillow. The smell was noticeable, but not unpleasant. Her tail, as thick as my wrist and longer than my arm, hung over the edge of the bed, restlessly swinging.

"Dr. Beatty saved your life." Muriel stood at the foot of the bed, glancing regularly at a blank sheet of paper on a clipboard. "I'd like to ask you some questions." She said nothing to that, but her eyes stayed on me. "Could you tell me your name, please?"

"Catherine."

"Do you have another name? A surname?"

"No."

"How old are you, Catherine?" Primed or not, I couldn't help feeling

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a slight giddiness, a sense of surreal inanity to be asking routine questions of a sphinx plucked from a nineteenth century oil painting.

"Seventeen."

"You know that Freda Macklenburg is dead?"

"Yes." Quieter, but still calm.

"What was your relationship with her?"

She frowned slightly, then gave an answer which sounded rehearsed but sincere, as if she had long expected to be asked this. "She was everything. She was my mother and my teacher and my friend." Misery and loss came and went on her face, a flicker, a twitch.

"Tell me what you heard, the day the power went off."

"Someone came to visit Freda. I heard the car, and the doorbell. It was a man. I couldn't hear what he said, but I could hear the sound of his voice."

"Was it a voice you'd heard before?"

"I don't think so."

"How did they sound? Were they shouting? Arguing?"

"No. They sounded friendly. Then they stopped, it was quiet. A little while after that, the power went off. Then I heard a truck pull up, and a whole lot of noise—footsteps, things being shifted about. But no more talking. There were two or three people moving all around the house for about half an hour. Then the truck and the car drove away. I kept waiting for Freda to come down and tell me what it had all been about."

I'd been thinking a while how to phrase the next question, but finally gave up trying to make it polite.

"Did Freda ever discuss with you why you're different from other people?"

"Yes." Not a hint of pain, or embarrassment. Instead, her face glowed with pride, and for a moment she looked so much like the painting that the giddiness hit me again. "She made me this way. She made me special. She made me beautiful."

"Why?"

That seemed to baffle her, as if I had to be teasing. She was special. She was beautiful. No further explanation was required.

I heard a faint grunt from just outside the door, followed by a tiny thud against the wall. I signaled to Muriel to drop to the floor, and to Catherine to keep silent, then—quietly as I could, but with an unavoidable squeaking—I climbed onto the top of a metal closet that stood in the corner to the left of the door.

We were lucky. What came through the door when it opened a crack was not a grenade of any kind, but a hand bearing a fan laser. A spinning mirror sweeps the beam across a wide arc—this one was set to one hundred and eighty degrees, horizontally. Held at shoulder height, it

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filled the room with a lethal plane about a meter above the bed. I was tempted to simply kick the door shut on the hand the moment it appeared, but that would have been too risky; the gun might have tilted down before the beam cut off. For the same reason, I couldn't simply burn a hole in the man's head as he stepped into the room, or even aim at the gun itself—it was shielded, and would have borne several seconds' fire before suffering any internal damage. Paint on the walls was scorched and the curtains had split into two burning halves; in an instant he would lower the beam onto Catherine. I kicked him hard in the face, knocking him backwards and tipping the fan of laser light up toward the ceiling. Then I jumped down and put my gun to his temple. He switched off the beam and let me take the weapon from him. He was dressed in an orderly's uniform, but the fabric was implausibly stiff, probably containing a shielding layer of aluminum-coated asbestos (with the potential for reflections, it's unwise to operate a fan laser with any less protection).

I turned him over and cuffed him in the standard way—wrists and ankles all brought together behind the back, in bracelets with a sharpened inner edge that discourages (some) attempts to burst the chains. I sprayed sedative on his face for a few seconds, and he acted like it had worked, but then I pulled open one eye and knew it hadn't. Every cop uses a sedative with a slightly different tracer effect; my usual turns the whites of the eyes pale blue. He must have had a barrier layer on his skin. While I was preparing an IV jab, he turned his head towards me and opened his mouth. A blade flew out from under his tongue and nicked my ear as it whistled past. That was something I'd never seen before. I forced his jaw open and had a look; the launching mechanism was anchored to his teeth with wires and pins. There was a second blade in there; I put my gun to his head again and advised him to eject it onto the floor. Then I punched him in the face and started searching for an easy vein.

He gave a short cry, and began vomiting steaming-hot blood. Possibly his own choice, but more likely his employers had decided to cut their losses. The body started smoking, so I dragged it out into the corridor.

The officers who'd been on guard were unconscious, not dead. A matter of pragmatism; chemically knocking someone senseless is usually quieter, less messy and less risky to the assailant than killing them. Also, dead cops have been known to trigger an extra impetus in many investigations, so it's worthwhile taking the trouble to avoid them. I phoned someone I knew in Toxicology to come and take a look at them, then radioed for replacements. Organizing the move to somewhere more secure would take twenty-four hours at least.

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Catherine was hysterical, and Muriel, pretty shaken herself, insisted on sedating her and ending the interview.

Muriel said, "I've read about it, but I've never seen it with my own eyes before. What does it feel like?"

"What?"

She emitted a burst of nervous laughter. She was shivering. I held onto her shoulders until she calmed down a little. "Being like that." Her teeth chattered. "Someone just tried to *kill us all,* and you're carrying on like nothing special happened. Like someone out of a comic book. What does it feel like?"

I laughed myself. We have a standard answer.

"It doesn't feel like anything at all."

Marion lay with her head on my chest. Her eyes were closed, but she wasn't asleep. I knew she was still listening to me. She always tenses up a certain way when I'm raving.

"How could anyone *do* that? How could anyone sit down and cold-bloodedly *plan* to create a deformed human being with no chance of living a normal life? All for some insane 'artist' somewhere who's keeping alive a dead billionaire's crazy theories. Shit, what do they think people are? Sculptures? *Things* they can mess around with any way they like?"

I wanted to sleep, it was late, but I couldn't shut up. I hadn't even realized how angry I was until I'd started on the topic, but then my disgust had grown more intense with every word I'd uttered.

An hour before, trying to make love, I'd found myself impotent. I'd resorted to using my tongue, and Marion had come, but it still depressed me. Was it psychological? The case I was on? Or a side-effect of the priming drugs? So suddenly, after all these years? There were rumors and jokes about the drugs causing almost everything imaginable: sterility, malformed babies, cancer, psychoses; but I'd never believed any of that. The union would have found out and raised hell, the department would never have been allowed to get away with it. It was the chimera case that was screwing me up, it had to be. So I talked about it.

"And the worst thing is, she doesn't even understand what's been done to her. She's been lied to from birth. Macklenburg told her she was *beautiful,* and she *believes* that crap, because she doesn't know any better."

Marion shifted slightly, and sighed. "What's going to happen to her? How's she going to live when she's out of hospital?"

"I don't know. I guess she could sell her story for quite a packet. Enough to hire someone to look after her for the rest of her life." I closed my eyes. "I'm sorry. It's not fair, keeping you awake half the night with this."

I heard a faint hissing sound, and Marion suddenly relaxed. For what

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seemed like several seconds, but can't have been, I wondered what was wrong with me, why I hadn't leapt to my feet, why I hadn't even raised my head to look across the dark room to find out who or what was there.

Then I realized the spray had hit me, too, and I was paralyzed. It was such a relief to be powerless that I slipped into unconsciousness feeling, absurdly, more peaceful than I had felt for a very long time.

I woke with a mixture of panic and lethargy, and no idea where I was or what had happened. I opened my eyes and saw nothing. I flailed about trying to touch my eyes, and felt myself drifting slightly, but my arms and legs were restrained. I forced myself to relax for a moment and interpret my sensations. I was blindfolded or bandaged, floating in a warm, buoyant liquid, my mouth and nose covered with a mask. My feeble thrashing movements had exhausted me, and for a long time I lay still, unable to concentrate sufficiently to even start guessing about my circumstances. I felt as if every bone in my body had been broken—not through any pain, but through a subtler discomfort arising from an unfamiliar sense of my body's configuration; it was awkward, it was wrong. It occurred to me that I might have been in an accident. A fire? That would explain why I was floating; I was in a burns treatment unit. I said, "Hello? I'm awake." The words came out as painful, hoarse whispers.

A blandly cheerful voice, almost genderless but borderline male, replied. I was wearing headphones; I hadn't noticed them until I felt them vibrate.

"Mr. Segel. How do you feel?"

"Uncomfortable. Weak. Where am I?"

"A long way from home, I'm afraid. But your wife is here, too."

It was only then that I remembered: lying in bed, unable to move. That seemed impossibly long ago, but I had no more recent memories to fill in the gap.

"How long have I been here? Where's Marion?"

"Your wife is nearby. She's safe and comfortable. You've been here a number of weeks, but you are healing rapidly. Soon you'll be ready for physiotherapy. So please, relax, be patient."

"Healing from what?"

"Mr. Segel, I'm afraid it was necessary to perform a great deal of surgery to adjust your appearance to suit my requirements. Your eyes, your face, your bone structure, your build, your skin tones; all needed substantial alteration."

I floated in silence. The face of the diffident youth in *The Caress* drifted across the darkness. I was horrified, but my disorientation cushioned the blow; floating in darkness, listening to a disembodied voice, nothing was yet quite real.

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"Why pick me?"

"You saved Catherine's life. On two occasions. That's precisely the relationship I wanted."

"Two set-ups. She was never in any real danger, was she? Why didn't you find someone who already looked the part, to go through the motions?" I almost added, "Gustave," but stopped myself in time. I was certain he intended killing me anyway, eventually, but betraying my suspicions about his identity would have been suicidal. The voice was synthetic, of course.

"You genuinely saved her life, Mr. Segel. If she'd stayed in the basement without replacement hormones, she would have died. And the assassin we sent to the hospital was seriously intent on killing her."

I snorted feebly. "What if he'd succeeded? Twenty years' work and millions of dollars, down the drain. What would you have done then?"

"Mr. Segel, you have a very parochial view of the world. Your little town isn't the only one on the planet. Your little police force isn't unique either, except in being the only one who couldn't keep the story from the media. We began with twelve chimeras. Three died in childhood. Three were not discovered in time after their keepers were killed. Four were assassinated after discovery. The other surviving chimera's life was saved by different people on the two occasions—and also she was not quite up to the standard of morphology that Freda Macklenburg achieved with Catherine. So, imperfect as you are, Mr. Segel, you are what I am required to work with."

Shortly after that, I was shifted to a normal bed, and the bandages were removed from my face and body. At first the room was kept dark, but each morning the lights were turned up slightly. Twice a day, a masked physiotherapist with a filtered voice came and helped me learn to move again. There were six armed, masked guards in the windowless room at all times; ludicrous overkill unless they were there in case of an unlikely, external attempt to rescue me. I could barely walk; one stern grandmother could have kept me from escaping.

They showed me Marion, once, on closed circuit TV. She sat in an elegantly furnished room, watching a news disk. Every few seconds, she glanced around nervously. They wouldn't let us meet. I was glad. I didn't want to see her reaction to my new appearance; that was an emotional complication I could do without.

As I slowly became functional, I began to feel a deep sense of panic that I'd yet to think of a plan for keeping us alive. I tried striking up conversations with the guards, in the hope of eventually persuading one of them to help us, either out of compassion or on the promise of a bribe, but they all stuck to monosyllables, and ignored me when I spoke of

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anything more abstract than requests for food. Refusing to cooperate in the "realization" was the only strategy I could think of, but for how long would that work? I had no doubt that my captor would resort to torturing Marion, and if that failed he would simply hypnotize or drug me to ensure that I complied. And then he would kill us all: Marion, myself, and Catherine.

I had no idea how much time we had; neither the guards, nor the physiotherapist, nor the cosmetic surgeons who occasionally came to check their handiwork, would even acknowledge my questions about the schedule being followed. I longed for Lindhquist to speak with me again; however insane he was, at least he'd engaged in a two-way conversation. I demanded an audience with him, I screamed and ranted; the guards remained as unresponsive as their masks.

Accustomed to the aid of the priming drugs in focusing my thoughts, I found myself constantly distracted by all kinds of unproductive concerns, from a simple fear of death, to pointless worries about my chances of continued employment, and continued marriage, if Marion and I did somehow survive. Weeks went by in which I felt nothing but hopelessness and self-pity. Everything that defined me had been taken away: my face, my body, my job, my usual modes of thought. And although I missed my former physical strength (as a source of self-respect rather than something that would have been useful in itself), it was the mental clarity that had been so much a part of my primed state of mind, that, I was certain, would have made all the difference if only I could have regained it.

I eventually began to indulge in a bizarre, romantic fantasy: The loss of everything I had once relied on—the stripping away of the biochemical props that had held my unnatural life together—would reveal an inner core of sheer moral courage and desperate resourcefulness which would see me through this hour of need. My identity had been demolished, but the naked spark of humanity remained, soon to burst into a searing flame that no prison walls could contain. That which had not killed me would (soon, real soon) make me strong.

A moment's introspection each morning showed that this mystical transformation had not yet taken place. I went on a hunger strike, hoping to hasten my victorious emergence from the crucible of suffering by turning up the heat. I wasn't force-fed, or even given intravenous protein. I was too stupid to make the obvious deduction: the day of the realization was imminent.

One morning, I was handed a costume which I recognized at once from the painting. I was terrified to the point of nausea, but I put it on and went with the guards, making no trouble. The painting was set outdoors. This would be my only chance to escape.

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I'd hoped we would have to travel, with all the opportunities that might have entailed, but the landscape had been prepared just a few hundred meters from the building I'd been kept in. I blinked at the glare from the thin grey clouds that covered most of the sky (had Lindhquist been waiting for them, or had he ordered their presence?), weary, frightened, weaker than ever thanks to not having eaten for three days. Desolate fields stretched to the horizon in all directions. There was nowhere to run to, nobody to signal to for help.

I saw Catherine, already sitting in place on the edge of a raised stretch of ground. A short man—well, shorter than the guards, whose height I'd grown accustomed to—stood by her, stroking her neck. She flicked her tail with pleasure, her eyes half closed. The man wore a loose white suit, and a white mask, rather like a fencing mask. When he saw me approaching, he raised his arms in an extravagant gesture of greeting. For an instant, a wild idea possessed me: Catherine could save us! With her speed, her strength, her *claws*.

There were a dozen armed men around us, and Catherine was clearly as docile as a kitten.

"Mr. Segel! You look so glum! Cheer up, please! This is a wonderful day!"

I stopped walking. The guards on either side of me stopped too, and did nothing to force me on.

I said, "I won't do it."

The man in white was indulgent. "Why ever not?"

I stared at him, trembling. I felt like a child. Not since childhood had I confronted anyone this way, without the priming drugs to calm me, without a weapon within easy reach, without absolute confidence in my strength and agility. "When we've done what you want, you're going to kill us all. The longer I refuse, the longer I stay alive."

It was Catherine who answered first. She shook her head, not quite laughing. "No, Dan! Andreas won't hurt us! He loves us both!"

The man came towards me. Had Andreas Lindhquist faked his death? His gait was not an old man's gait.

"Mr. Segel, please, calm yourself. Would I harm my own creations? Would I waste all those years of hard work, by myself and so many others?"

I sputtered, confused. "You've killed people. You've kidnapped us. You've broken a hundred different laws." I almost shouted at Catherine, "*He* arranged Freda's death!" but I had a feeling that would have done me a lot more harm than good.

The computer that disguised his voice laughed blandly. "Yes, I've broken laws. Whatever happens to you, Mr. Segel, I've already broken them. Do you think I'm afraid of what you'll do when I release you? You will

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be as powerless then to harm me as you are now. You have no proof as to my identity. Oh, I've examined a record of your inquiries. I know you suspected me—"

"I suspected your son."

"Ah. A moot point. I prefer to be called Andreas by intimate acquaintances, but to business associates, I am Gustave Lindhquist. You see, this body *is* that of my son—if son is the right word to use for a clone—but since his birth I took regular samples of my brain tissue, and had the appropriate components extracted from them and injected into his skull. The brain can't be *transplanted*, Mr. Segel, but with care, a great deal of memory and personality can be imposed upon a young child. When my first body died, I had the brain frozen, and I continued the injections until all the tissue was used up. Whether or not I 'am' Andreas is a matter for philosophers and theologians. I clearly recall sitting in a crowded classroom watching a black and white television, the day Neil Armstrong stepped on the moon, fifty-two years before this body was born. So call me Andreas. Humor an old man."

He shrugged. "The masks, the voice filters—I like a little theater. And the less you see and hear, the fewer your avenues for causing me minor annoyance. But please, don't flatter yourself; you can never be a threat to me. I could buy every member of your entire force with half the amount I've earned while we've been speaking.

"So forget these delusions of martyrdom. You are going to live, and for the rest of your life you will be, not only my creation, but my instrument. You are going to carry this moment away inside you, out into the world for me, like a seed, like a strange, beautiful virus, infecting and transforming everyone and everything you touch."

He took me by the arm and led me toward Catherine. I didn't resist. Someone placed a winged staff in my right hand. I was prodded, arranged, adjusted, fussed over. I hardly noticed Catherine's cheek against mine, her paw resting against my belly. I stared ahead, in a daze, trying to decide whether or not to believe I was going to live, overcome by this first real chance of hope, but too terrified of disappointment to trust it.

There was no one but Lindhquist and his guards and assistants. I don't know what I'd expected; an audience in evening dress? He stood a dozen meters away, glancing down at a copy of the painting (or perhaps it was the original) mounted on an easel, then calling out instructions for microscopic changes to our posture and expression. My eyes began to water, from keeping my gaze fixed; someone ran forward and dried them, then sprayed something into them which prevented a recurrence.

Then, for several minutes, Lindhquist was silent. When he finally spoke, he said, very softly, "All we're waiting for now is the movement

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of the sun, the correct positioning of your shadows. Be patient for just a little longer."

I don't remember clearly what I felt in those last seconds. I was so tired, so confused, so uncertain. I do remember thinking: How will I know when the moment has passed? When Lindhquist pulls out a weapon and incinerates us, perfectly preserving the moment? Or when he pulls out a camera? *Which would it be?*

Suddenly he said, "Thank you," and turned and walked away, alone. Catherine shifted, stretched, kissed me on the cheek, and said, "Wasn't that fun?" One of the guards took my elbow, and I realized I'd staggered.

He hadn't even taken a photograph. I giggled hysterically, certain now that I was going to live after all. And he hadn't even taken a photograph. I couldn't decide if that made him twice as insane, or if it totally redeemed his sanity.

I never discovered what became of Catherine. Perhaps she stayed with Lindhquist, shielded from the world by his wealth and seclusion, living a life effectively identical to that she'd lived before, in Freda Macklenburg's basement. Give or take a few servants and luxurious villas.

Marion and I were returned to our home, unconscious for the duration of the voyage, waking on the bed we'd left six months before. There was a lot of dust about. She took my hand and said, "Well. Here we are." We lay there in silence for hours, then went out in search of food.

The next day I went to the station. I proved my identity with fingerprints and DNA, and gave a full report of all that had happened.

I had not been assumed dead. My salary had continued to be paid into my bank account, and mortgage payments deducted automatically. The department settled my claim for compensation out of court, paying me three quarters of a million dollars, and I underwent surgery to restore as much of my former appearance as possible.

It took more than two years of rehabilitation, but now I am back on active duty. The Macklenburg case has been shelved for lack of evidence. The investigation of the kidnapping of the three of us, and Catherine's present fate, is on the verge of going the same way; nobody doubts my account of the events, but all the evidence against Gustave Lindhquist is circumstantial. I accept that. I'm glad. I want to erase everything that Lindhquist has done to me, and an obsession with bringing him to justice is the exact opposite of the state of mind I aim to achieve. I don't pretend to understand what he thought he was achieving by letting me live, what his insane notion of my supposed effect on the world actually entailed, but I am determined to be, in every way, the same person as I was before the experience, and thus to defeat his intentions.

Marion is doing fine. For a while she suffered from recurring night-

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mares, but after seeing a therapist who specializes in detraumatizing hostages and kidnap victims, she is now every bit as relaxed and carefree as she used to be.

I have nightmares, now and then. I wake in the early hours of the morning, shivering and sweating and crying out, unable to recall what horror I'm escaping. Andreas Lindhquist injecting samples of brain tissue into his son? Catherine blissfully closing her eyes, and thanking me for saving her life while her claws rake my body into bloody strips? Myself, trapped in *The Caress*; the moment of the realization infinitely, unmercifully prolonged? Perhaps; or perhaps I simply dream about my latest case—that seems much more likely.

Everything is back to normal. ●

INFORMATION

Voices
shooting through the night
messages exchanged
in a binary universe
yes-no zero-one dark-light

our deeds will be measured
by amplitude and frequency
we need redundancy, desire duration
the phosphorescence of touch
a residue of presence

shooting through this night
exchanging messages
across a field of white
noise
suffering

degradation decay
leaving but a momentary trace
an uncertain pattern
of our short indeterminate lives
here on this entropic snow

—Steven B. Katz

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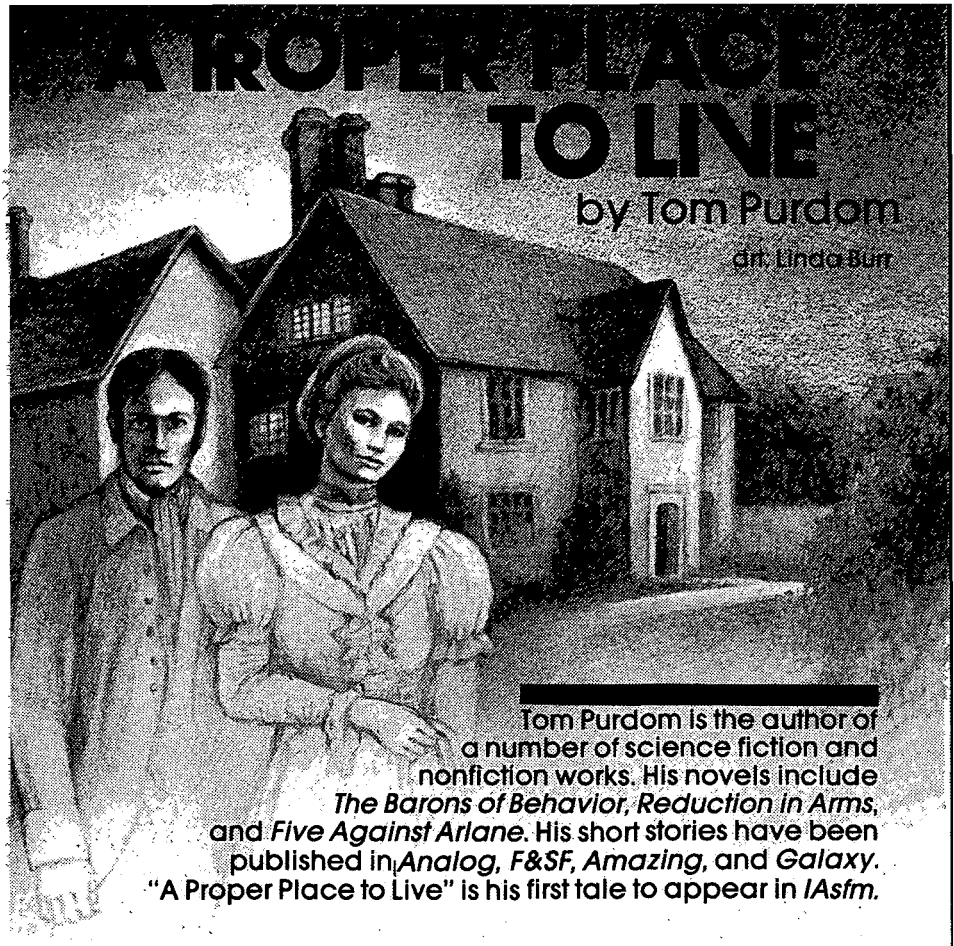
A PROPER PLACE TO LIVE

by Tom Purdom

art: Linda Burr



Tom Purdom is the author of a number of science fiction and nonfiction works. His novels include *The Barons of Behavior*, *Reduction in Arms*, and *Five Against Arlane*. His short stories have been published in *Analog*, *F&SF*, *Amazing*, and *Galaxy*. "A Proper Place to Live" is his first tale to appear in *IAsfm*.

"Do you have any good works which must be performed this afternoon?" Sir Harold Tudor-Smith asked his wife at lunch (which was, of course, her breakfast).

"Today is Tuesday, Harold."

"Ah, yes. Of course."

Tuesday was the day Lady Millicent taught reading to the children of widows whose husbands had been employed in the tea trade. The Tudor-Smiths had been enjoying their current way of life for over six years now and for that entire period it had been Lady Millicent's custom to sleep until noon and spend the afternoon playing the harpsichord and doing good works—a regimen which she had adhered to with the steadfastness

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which was, as Sir Harold had often told her, one of the more appealing aspects of her character.

It was not, in Lady Millicent's opinion, the most impressive compliment she received from her husband—although she always acknowledged it, of course, with the graciousness which was also an appealing part of her character. Steadfastness, in Lady Millicent's view, was one of the indispensable attributes of a Lady. There was no virtue more fundamental than steadfastness—not even the ability to play the harpsichord with deftness and taste.

Today, however, on this bright September afternoon in 17—, Sir Harold was concerned with issues that must, sadly, take precedence over all other considerations.

"It involves Volume, Millicent."

"Ahh. Well. . . ."

"And someone may be Preaching Against It."

"Well. In that case, Harold."

The first notes of Mr. William Tyler's new "mechanical contrivance" reached them when they were still several streets from the address given in the news item that had brought this matter to Sir Harold's attention. The tune was only a simple dance—a bouree from a suite of elementary pieces by Mr. Telemann—but it was already forcing its way through the rumble of carriages, the shouts of workingmen, and all the other street noises that normally created such a pleasant background for Sir Harold's thoughts when he strolled through his city. By the time they were within two hundred yards of the machine, by Sir Harold's estimate, the dance had been repeated five times without variation, and they were pushing through a force that dominated everything around them. Circles of children and young people were dancing as if they were being sprayed by fire hoses. Older people were walking around with their palms clapped over their ears. Dazed faces were peering out of windows and street vendors and their customers were trying to shout at each other through cupped hands. About a third of the people around them seemed to be drifting toward the source of the sound as if they were being pulled toward a drain—and another third seemed to be moving away from it as if they were being pushed by a gentle but relentless wind.

The center of all this commotion was a modest three story house located near the western corner of the intersection mentioned in Mr. Wilberforce's weekly. A signboard advertising *William Tyler, Mechanic* hung from the second floor and a crowd was gathered around an iron door that was big enough to admit a good-sized carriage. At the next intersection, about thirty paces from the iron door, another crowd had gathered around a man in a black robe who was shouting something from a portable

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pulpit. A couple of dozen younger people were hopping and bouncing in time to the storm of sound coming from William Tyler's second floor window, but most of the citizens on the street seemed to be shouting at each other or listening to the pulpiteer.

In the center of the crowd in front of the mechanic's shop, with his back pressed against the door, a stooped, gray-haired man was scowling at a phalanx of waving fists. Sir Harold and his lady had both blocked their ears with wadded-up handkerchiefs but it was obvious Mr. Tyler and his opponents were saying a few words about the rights of Englishmen.

Sir Harold removed the handkerchief from his right ear, so he could use his right hand, and managed to stretch his arm through the crowd and offer the mechanic his card. It was a long reach, and the shoulders and heads bobbing in front of them should have created an impenetrable obstacle, but this was, after all, *his* London.

"I would appreciate it if I could speak to you in private," Sir Harold shouted through the fifteenth repetition of the tune thundering out of the second floor window. "I am extremely interested in some of the possibilities created by your invention."

Mr. Tyler's brow furrowed. He had, indeed, been discussing the rights of Englishmen with two red-faced men with very large backs. It took him a moment to change gears and turn his attention to the polite, rather diffident man who had apparently handed him a card across a distance that would have created a problem for someone who had arms as long as crutches.

"Excuse me," Sir Harold said. "Please excuse me. Thank you."

"If you don't mind," Lady Millicent said. "Thank you. That's very kind of you."

The crowd parted before the gentle pressure of Sir Harold's walking stick and Lady Millicent's parasol. Two smiling, good-natured faces slipped between Mr. Tyler and the two men who had firm opinions on the rights of Englishmen, a few vaguely promising, not quite intelligible words reached the mechanic's ear, a gentle hand rested on his shoulder, and he and his two companions disappeared through the narrow wooden door that led to his private quarters.

The apparatus had been installed in the parlor on the second floor, near the top of the stairs they had started climbing as soon as Lady Millicent had closed the private door and made sure it was securely locked. A child who looked as if she were about nine years old was sitting at the keyboard with a happy smile on her face, playing—once again—the same tune they had been hearing for the last ten minutes.

Sir Harold gestured at the instrument. "It might be easier to talk if. . . ."

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The mechanic frowned again, but there was, as Sir Harold knew, very little chance he would be able to deny the request. The polite, carefully dressed gentleman standing in front of him was, after all, a Tudor-Smith. And the tall, gentle-faced woman eyeing him through her pince-nez was not only a Tudor-Smith but was also, in her own right, by descent, a Cuddleby. Of the Puddleby Cuddlebys.

Mr. Tyler's daughter insisted on playing the last few bars of her tune but after that she threw up her hands in a final grand gesture and scrambled onto her bench and started curtsying. Sir Harold and his lady straightened up as if they had just put down a pair of heavy packages. The voices of the people standing in the street reached them for the first time.

Lady Millicent applauded politely. Sir Harold stepped up to the instrument without a pause and dropped to a crouch beside the arrangement of pipes and levers on the left side.

"I think we should start by having you show me how it works," Sir Harold said. "If you wouldn't mind, that is."

The mechanic's face lit up. He stepped forward with his eyes beaming and in a moment he was crouching beside Sir Harold and showing him how the machine derived its mechanical power, just as the newspaper writer had stated, "from its ingenious use of the high pressure water system which has been a standard feature of London life for the last half decade." Water from the street, it seemed, was passed through a series of ingeniously shaped tubes which actually tripled its pressure even before it entered the instrument proper. Then, once inside the instrument. . . .

"I found out that if I pinched the pipe in the middle, like that . . . I had a lot of trouble designing joints that would stand up to the kind of pressure I'm talking about here, but. . . ."

Sir Harold nodded wisely and produced properly timed head shakes and other gestures of amazed appreciation. The high pressure water system had been one of his most important alterations and he had known when he had arranged it that it had implications that went beyond daily showers and other amenities. He hadn't realized it could be used to bring Volume into his surroundings—he had thought that required electricity—but he wasn't particularly surprised either. If a system as logical as a series of pipes and valves could logically be used to do something, then some human mind would eventually work through all the reasoning involved and come to the inevitable conclusion. It was even more likely someone would do the necessary intellectual work, furthermore, when the end result was something human beings valued as much as they seemed to value Volume.

The London Sir Harold lived in—*his* London—was not, of course, the

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London you may read about in certain dreary books. In Sir Harold's London, the German composer Johann Sebastian Bach frequently crossed the English Channel—at the invitation of his good friend George Friedrich Handel—and personally staged performances of his works which invariably sent him home with his ears ringing with popular acclaim and his purse well stuffed with good English gold. The six concertos Herr Bach had composed for the Margrave of Brandenburg did not languish unplayed in the Margrave's library but were performed almost weekly by some of the finest instrumentalists in the city, many of whom received their fees from Sir Harold himself. There had even been two occasions on which the German composer's great mass in the key of B minor had been performed in Westminster Abbey, with the composer himself conducting and several hundred perfectly respectable citizens camping outside the church for a week in advance to make sure they would be permitted to squeeze into a pew.

As Sir Harold was well aware, it was a milieu which existed—like all good places—In Spite Of and Because Of. No one had to tell him there were Europes in which Herr Bach's mass had also sat unperformed for many decades and Londons where the music of Buxtehude and Couperin was not a normal part of daily life. There were even Londons in which the streets were dirty, horses created horrible traffic jams, and honest workingmen didn't live in neat, clean houses and whistle bits from *Messiah* and *Judas Maccabaeus* as they laid bricks, painted gates, and arranged their wares in tidy shops furnished with good clean running water. Those places existed. They were real. They were always there, on the edge of things, like water lapping at the dike, or wolves circling the fire.

Outside the pulpiteer was still preaching, but Mr. Tyler was so engrossed in his dissertation he apparently didn't hear the angry voice denouncing his marvelous work. Sir Harold, however, could hear voices demanding that the "music" should begin again, and other voices, equally angry, taking the other side of the matter. Lady Millicent gave him an anxious look from her position near the edge of the window and he managed to excuse himself for a moment and take her aside.

"Do you think you could step to the door, Millicent? And send a messenger to the Musicians' Guild?"

Lady Millicent straightened her back. "If you think it's necessary, Harold."

Sir Harold removed a pen and pad from his waistcoat and hastily scribbled a note. From her seat near the fireplace, Mr. Tyler's daughter was eyeing the keyboard with obvious restlessness.

"I'm afraid it's unavoidable, Millicent. You can explain to the people

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outside that the device is silent right now because Mr. Tyler is explaining its working to a gentleman who may be able to do him some service."

Sir Harold returned to Mr. Tyler's lecture and Lady Millicent picked her way down the stairs and confronted the crowd that had shifted to Mr. Tyler's private door. A few people surged forward when the door opened but they came to a halt as soon as they saw who was standing there.

"I would appreciate it very much if I could have the services of a messenger," Lady Millicent said. "Is there anyone here who would care to earn an easy shilling?"

Two boys and a slight, bright-eyed man in his middle twenties raised their hands and started pushing forward. Lady Millicent pointed to the young man and then silenced one of the boys, before he could complain, with a simple movement of her other hand.

A plump, tousle-haired girl raised her fist at the back of the crowd. "Where's our music? What have you done with our music?"

The young man stopped in front of the door stoop and Lady Millicent handed him Sir Harold's note. "Where's our music?" the girl repeated. "What are you doing with Mr. Tyler's invention?"

"Mr. Tyler's device," Lady Millicent said, "is silent right now because he is explaining its workings to a gentleman who may be able to do him some service."

"The only service he needs is a little work with an axe," one of the stout men who had been arguing with Mr. Tyler said.

Lady Millicent turned toward the man and raised her eyebrows. His smile faded and his face slowly reddened. She transferred her attention to another aspect of the scene in front of her and the stout man made a little half step and disappeared behind a tall tradesman.

Like Sir Harold, Lady Millicent could only employ the powers customarily associated with her station. Most of the time, fortunately, that was all she needed.

The orator in the pulpit—Mr. Herbert according to the news item—was still preaching, even though the music had stopped, and a number of the people who had been standing in the street were drifting toward his post. Every word he was saying could be heard at this end of the street. The tousle-haired young girl had turned away from the Lady standing on Mr. Tyler's step but now she was advancing, with her head lowered and her fists clenched, toward three older women who were standing between her and the edge of the crowd around the pulpit. Two bouncy-looking boys joined her while Lady Millicent watched and a pair of older men came in from the right and fell into line with the three women.

Mr. Herbert was speaking of the rights God had given His creatures. He was talking about the beauty of intelligence and calm reflection and

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he had already made a few mentions of our moral duty to resist with all our might the emissaries of sin and evil. The crowd on the street, in Lady Millicent's opinion, was clearly beginning to divide into two camps. She was particularly struck by the way some of the more experienced-looking people were edging toward the sidelines.

She swept her eyes around the scene with the air of someone who was making sure everything was satisfactory and then twisted the doorknob and stepped inside.

"I believe things may be getting out of hand, Harold."

"Are you quite sure, Millicent?"

"I am *absolutely* sure, Harold."

A sigh reached her from the top of the stairs. "If you don't mind, Mr. Tyler. . . ."

The mechanic muttered something inaudible and a moment later Sir Harold stepped onto the second floor landing and trotted down the stairs with his coat swinging and his walking stick tucked under his arm. He pulled open the door with a flick of his velvet sleeves and stepped into the open as if he were about to call for his carriage.

The tousle-haired young girl was standing only three steps from the back of the crowd around the pulpit. The three older women and their two protectors were eyeing her and her companions with their parasols and walking sticks held in various all-too-prominent ways. Half a dozen similar groups seemed to be coalescing in other parts of the street. Voices were beginning to compete with the oration emanating from the pulpit. A few of the people standing in front of Mr. Tyler's house pressed forward and Sir Harold smiled at them pleasantly.

"I think I'd better have a word with that fellow, Millicent. I'll be back in a few minutes. Excuse me there, will you please? Thank you. Thank you."

The sound of Mr. Telemann's bouree reached him when he was halfway down the street. He had expected it but he glanced back anyway and was relieved to note that Lady Millicent was engrossed in conversation with two middle-aged, rather over-dressed, women. Their hats and their broad backs were bobbing up and down with some animation and it was quite clear no one was going to reach Mr. Tyler's door as long as Lady Millicent's companions were enjoying the attention of the Personage standing on the step.

Lady Millicent, as Sir Harold had frequently noted with some satisfaction, knew how to take full advantage of her powers.

Some of the people around him had started shaking their fists at Mr. Tyler's windows and some of them had started dancing and capering with infuriatingly satisfied looks on their faces, but no one interfered with him as he skirted the edge of the crowd near the pulpit. A few men

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even touched their foreheads and mouthed something that was obviously a good day, sir. Two or three women dimpled and presented him with their prettiest curtsies when he lifted his hat and gave them a smile.

The crowd immediately in front of him parted before the gentle pressure of his stick. He looked up at the orating clergyman and presented his card with a bow and a very eighteenth century sweep of his headgear.

"Excuse me, old fellow. If I might have a word with you. . . ."

Mr. Herbert, like Mr. Tyler, looked startled and a little confused.

"I really would appreciate it," Sir Harold said. "If you would be so kind. . . ."

The clergyman might, indeed, love *the* Lord—Sir Harold had no doubt that he did, in fact—but he, too, like most of his countrymen, apparently found it hard to resist *a* lord. He descended from his perch after a few hasty excuses and Sir Harold led him toward a small alley located between two houses.

Three young ladies of the highest status came around the corner as they reached the end of the alley and strolled past them with their parasols framing their faces. They were of varying heights and hair colors but they were each enough to make Sir Harold lean on his cane and look appreciative and they all smiled in return as they passed. A quick glance at Mr. Herbert indicated, however, that he had hardly noticed their existence.

"I would appreciate it, Sir Harold, if you would tell me what you have in mind. I believe my flock is already getting restless."

A motion of Sir Harold's cane had brought the smiling trio back for another pass but there was still no flicker of a gleam on Mr. Herbert's face. There were only a few reasons, Sir Harold believed, why people engaged in the kind of activity Mr. Herbert was indulging in, and it didn't take long to eliminate most of them. An offer of a large sum of money for unspecified services was immediately refused on the grounds that Mr. Herbert was occupied with causes that could not be abandoned for any purpose. So, too, was a fine position on the board of one of the leading charities supported by Mr. Herbert's denomination.

That left—alas—only one serious possibility, in Sir Harold's opinion. What Mr. Herbert most wanted was what he had here today.

"I'm really most sorry you feel that way, Mr. Herbert," Sir Harold said. "Lady Millicent and I have been deeply impressed with your actions. We came here, in fact, largely because of your presence."

"Thank you very much. I appreciate that. Now if you will excuse me, my flock. . . ."

"I am associated with a number of important enterprises, Mr. Herbert. I cannot leave a man of your ability without making one more attempt to recruit his talents in the service of at least one of them. I would

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especially like to offer you, sir, a lively and responsible post in the Society for the Encouragement of Public Cleanliness and Decency or the Society for the Improvement of the Manners of the Lower Orders. You could do valuable work in either of them, in my opinion. Or both, if you felt you could sacrifice that much of your time to the betterment of the world."

Mr. Herbert paused with his body braced for one more attempt to slip sideways and somehow maneuver himself past the indolent gentleman whose person and cane always seemed to come between him and his pulpit. The expression on Mr. Herbert's face made it quite clear he was aware that both of the organizations Sir Harold had mentioned had been involved in public disturbances in the last fortnight. Only two days ago, twenty of the leading members of the Society for the Improvement of the Manners of the Lower Orders had been set upon with paving stones and flower pots when they had held a lecture-meeting in Mixers Cross; their arrest and imprisonment had initiated a series of judicial actions that might keep the courts occupied for two decades.

"Both of those organizations need the kind of ability you can bring to them," Sir Harold said. "At this very moment, in fact, the Society for the Improvement of the Manners of the Lower Orders is holding a meeting which may decide its entire future. If it were to fall into the wrong hands. . . ."

A chair carried by two broad-shouldered youths swept around the corner in response, apparently, to a sweep of Sir Harold's stick. A card and a small purse were thrust into Mr. Herbert's hand.

The clergyman stared for a moment at his pulpit and the scene in the street. His eyes seemed particularly attracted by the point at which the three matrons and the tousle-haired young girl were still eyeing each other.

"I need you desperately, Mr. Herbert. *England* needs you. The Society for the Improvement of the Lower Orders faces, in my opinion, decades of legal injustice and public calumny. If you will simply present this card at the door. . . ."

Mr. Herbert straightened. Visions of decades of legal injustice and public calumny brought a new light into his face. He hoisted himself between the curtains of the chair and Sir Harold leaned on his stick and watched the two broad-shouldered youths trot him around the corner to the land of his dreams.

An older man had already stepped into the pulpit and taken Mr. Herbert's place, but it was clear the people around the platform were having trouble hearing him over the charms of Mr. Telemann's bouree. The red faced young girl was dancing again, now that Mr. Herbert had been replaced, and the three older women and their friends were now the people who looked as if they might be seriously contemplating violence.

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The populace of his London, in Sir Harold's opinion, was basically peaceful and contented, but the strain created by Mr. Herbert's sermon and Mr. Tyler's machine had been building up for several hours now. All around him he could see angry faces, sullen faces, brooding faces. Even most of the dancers were casting defiant or arrogant looks at the people watching them. A few steps from Mr. Tyler's house a little boy was deliberately executing a cheeky set of movements in front of two tight-faced couples.

Lady Millicent was still chatting with her two admirers. Sir Harold's walking stick and his apologetic smile got him through the crowd in front of the house again and a tip of his hat and a soft word shifted the two ladies to the left and placed him on the steps. He looked around the street, smiling vacantly, and saw six well-fed, well-dressed men and women striding around the north corner with containers of various sizes and shapes clutched in their hands.

"Excuse me, Millicent. If you don't mind, ladies. . . ."

"Yes, Harold?"

"Our friends from the Musicians' Guild seem to be here. Would you mind talking to them for a moment and then joining me upstairs?"

"Certainly, Harold."

A minute later Sir Harold and Mr. Tyler were once again bent over the machine and Mr. Tyler's daughter was perched on the edge of a chair with her arms folded over her pinafore.

"I would appreciate it if you would let me indulge in a bit of business talk," Sir Harold said. "I have a certain interest in supporting the arts, as you may be aware. . . ."

Mr. Tyler's face brightened. "Would you care for some refreshment, Sir Harold? Can I offer you some tea? Or do you prefer coffee?"

"Tea will do nicely, thank you."

A trumpet call interrupted their conversation a moment after Miss Tyler exited in search of the tea. The trumpet broke into a bouree very similar to the dance she had been playing and then more instruments joined in, one by one. By the time Miss Tyler had returned with a tray, Lady Millicent had re-entered the parlor, and the musicians had switched to an allemande, from a suite by Herr Bach, whose sonorities included the sound of a few string instruments.

Miss Tyler stared out the window with a frown on her round little face. "We seem to have attracted some street musicians," Sir Harold said.

"It does sound that way," Mr. Tyler said. "Actually, I'm afraid I'm not really much of a one for music. That's not bad though, if you don't mind my saying so. Did I tell you I've been thinking about ways my thing could imitate almost anything else—anything you blow into anyway?"

Sir Harold had asked Mr. Tyler about his financial ambitions while

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they were waiting for the tea and he had already decided the mechanic was very like most of the other inexperienced inventors he had dealt with. Mr. Tyler was essentially an enthusiast who would probably be content to spend the rest of his life in his shop bending and connecting and turning out whatever marvels his brain seized upon. He was also the victim, however, of the customary delusions about the wealth and social position you could amass by inventing things. He was already talking—with some enthusiasm—of the dowry he would provide his daughter, the house he and she would soon live in, and all the other glories that are supposed to come to every man who bestows the blessings of his creative vision on mankind.

They were all desires Sir Harold could fulfill with some dispatch. Mr. Tyler was a good bargainer, but Sir Harold easily detected the mechanic's little swallow when he heard the sum his visitor was offering for the exclusive rights to the use of his invention. He could even pick up some of the tension in Mr. Tyler's facial muscles when he explained that the machine would be used in Westminster Abbey on certain state occasions and that it would be the center of a festival of grand and heroic music which would become one of the great annual events of the city.

It was a vision that had been given some thought on Sir Harold's part. The great machine would dominate much of the program but there would be trumpets, too. And drums. And hundreds of musicians. And then, when the people had all been exhausted by Volume, the sound of a single pipe would be heard in the land. . . .

There was nothing wrong with Volume in itself, in Sir Harold's opinion. He himself enjoyed a fine surging climax or the swell of a great chorus, with voices, organ chords, and musical instruments resonating in the cavity of a great church. The problem was uncontrolled Volume. Volume that was created by portable and relatively inexpensive devices must eventually, Sir Harold knew, escape from its natural realm. Sooner or later, if it were not watched with care, it would penetrate domains that should be ruled by gentler noises, or even by silence. Mr. Tyler had already mentioned that he was thinking about other devices which could draw their power from the water system, and he had noted, in passing, that he could design a smaller version of his machine which could be wheeled around on carts and attached to outlets in parks and other places where people might want something "a bit livelier than a pair of flutes."

The sticking point—as Sir Harold had feared—was the stipulation that he should have *exclusive* rights to the use of the new machine. Mr. Tyler had also realized that if Sir Harold were willing to spend so much money, his invention must be even more valuable than he had thought it was.

Sir Harold smiled. "I was afraid you would see that. I seem to be dealing with a very shrewd man, Millicent."

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"It's occurred to me, in fact," Mr. Tyler said, "that this might be something on which I could take bids. You *are* the first person who's approached me, Sir Harold."

Lady Millicent straightened—an act which always impressed Sir Harold since she was, at any given moment, standing as erectly as a lady should. She looked at Mr. Tyler in the same way she had looked at the man who had made a remark to her in front of the house and he, too, turned away from her.

"I'm afraid I don't normally engage in auctions," Sir Harold said. "It really isn't our type of thing."

"My husband has made you a very good offer, Mr. Tyler," Lady Millicent said. "I can assure you no one has ever regretted any agreement they have negotiated with a member of my family."

Mr. Tyler's face reddened. Sir Harold rested his right hand on the mechanic's grimy sleeve and used his other hand to make a nonchalant, mildly apologetic gesture with his stick.

"I can already see the expression of delight that will cross the King's face when he hears the first notes of your device next month," Sir Harold said. "It will be a pleasure to introduce His Majesty to the originator of such an invention—and his charming daughter. I would be very surprised if you did not find yourself and your daughter invited to be permanent guests at every Royal Festival in which your invention plays a role."

Mr. Tyler swallowed. He glanced at Lady Millicent out of the corner of his eye and she gave him a smile that bathed him in sunshine and approval.

"It does sound like a generous arrangement, Sir Harold. I suppose I might do better if I shopped around, but on the other hand, I could do a lot worse, too, couldn't I? And waste a lot of time I could be spending enjoying myself."

"Then let's shake on it, sir. Like two gentlemen. And let me give you something in writing, too—like a good businessman should."

A solid grip pressed on Mr. Tyler's rough hand. Paper and a pen emerged from Sir Harold's pockets. Words appeared on the paper. Sir Harold appended his neat, unremarkable signature at the end and Mr. Tyler found himself clutching the pen and affixing his own name beside it.

"I'll take this to my solicitors and have them send you two good copies," Sir Harold said. "You'll have them by this evening, along with three hundred pounds to seal the bargain."

Lady Millicent extended her hand and presented Mr. Tyler with a card engraved with the address of one of her charities. "I would appreciate it very much if you would call on me at this address," Lady Millicent said. "We have some pressing problems which could use the attention

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of a gentleman with your skills. I can assure you every lady there would appreciate any effort you can bring to bear on our affairs."

Mr. Tyler pushed himself out of his chair as if he were wearing clothes stuffed with lead. He stared at his two guests with eyes that looked a little glazed and unfocused and Sir Harold leaned on his stick and waited politely.

"Could you see your way to making that five hundred pounds, Sir Harold? If you don't mind. I'll be buying Nellie some new clothes, for one thing."

"Of course. Think nothing of it."

"I have my own things made at Madame Russell's," Lady Millicent said. "On Plumtree Street. I'll be happy to tell her your daughter is coming if you would care to look at her offerings."

"In fact," Sir Harold said, "we could even drop your young lady off there right now. And make arrangements to have her returned when she's finished. Don't you think we could manage that, Millicent? Eh?"

"What a marvelous idea, Harold. Of course."

Tea had taken its place in the music room, Lady Millicent was seated at the harpsichord, and the children of widows whose husbands had been employed in the tea trade were gorging on cakes and chocolate in an upstairs location while they awaited the belated arrival of their reading teacher. "I really couldn't have handled it without you, Millicent," Sir Harold said. "You were superb, my dear. Absolutely superb."

"Thank you, Harold."

"And there's even time for you to play for a few minutes before you go upstairs, eh? You should be able to fit in something from that notebook Mr. Bach wrote for his wife, shouldn't you?"

"Of course, Harold. Would you care for the second partita? Or would you prefer the first?"

"Whatever you like, my dear. Whatever you like."

The muffled rumble of carts and wagons reached them through the curtains. Birds twittered and shrilled in the garden. Lady Millicent rested her fingers on the keyboard with her hands slightly arched and her elbows, wrists and hands level, just as Monsieur Couperin recommended, and the first notes of the second partita replaced the faint neighing of a horse and the subdued oaths of an impeccably considerate carter.

"There is nothing like the influence of a Lady," Sir Harold said.

"Or a gentleman, Harold. Or a gentleman." ●

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PERSONAL SILENCE

by Molly Gloss

art: A.C. Farley

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There was a little finger of land, a peninsula, that stuck up from the corner of Washington State pointing straight north at Vancouver Island. On the state map it was small enough it had no name. Jay found an old Clallam County map in a used bookstore in Olympia and on the county map the name was printed the long way, marching northward up the finger's reach: Naniamuk. There was a clear bubble near the tip, like a fingernail, and that was named too: Mizzle. He liked the way the finger pointed at Vancouver Island. Now he liked the name the town had. He bought a chart of the strait between Mizzle and Port Renfrew and a used book on small boat building and when he left Olympia he went up the county roads to Naniamuk and followed the peninsula's one paved road all the way out to its dead end at Mizzle.

It was a three-week walk. His leg had been broken and badly healed a couple of years ago when he had been arrested in Colombia. He could walk long-strided, leaning into the straps of the pack, arms pumping loosely, hands unfisted, and he imagined anyone watching him would have had a hard time telling, but if he did more than eight or ten miles in a day he got gimpy and that led to blisters. So he had learned not to push it. He camped in a logged-over state park one night, bummed a couple of nights in barns and garages, slept other nights just off the road, in whatever grass and stunted trees grew at the edge of the right-of-way.

The last day, halfway along the Naniamuk peninsula, he left the road and hiked west to the beach, through the low pines and grassy dunes and coils of rusted razorwire, and set his tent on the sand at the edge of the grass. It was a featureless beach, wide and flat, stretching toward no visible headlands. There were few driftlogs, and at the tide line just broken clamshells, dead kelp, garbage, wreckage. No tidepools, no offshore stacks, no agates. The surf broke far out and got muddy as it rolled in. When the sun went down behind the overcast, the brown combers blackened and vanished without luminescence.

The daylight that rose up slowly the next morning was gray and damp, standing at the edge of rain. He wore his rubber-bottom shoes tramping in the wet grass along the edge of the road to Mizzle. The peninsula put him in mind of the mid-coast of Chile, the valleys between Talca and Puerto Montt—flat and low-lying, the rain-beaten grass pocked with little lakes and bogs. There was not the great poverty of the Chilean valleys, but if there had been prosperity up here once, it was gone. The big beachfront houses were boarded up, empty. The rich had moved in from the coasts. Houses still lived in were dwarfish, clinker-built, with small windows oddly placed. People were growing cranberries in the bogs and raising bunches of blond, stupid-faced cattle on the wet pasturage.

At the town limit of Mizzle a big, quaintly painted signboard stood up beside the road. WELCOME TO MIZZLE! MOST WESTERLY TOWN

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IN THE CONTIGUOUS UNITED STATES OF AMERICA! Jay stood at the shoulder of the road and sketched the sign in his notebook for its odd phrasing, its fanciful enthusiasm.

The town was more than he had thought, and less. There had been three or four motels—one still ran a neon vacancy sign. An RV park had a couple of trailers standing in it. The downtown was a short row of gift shops and ice cream stores, mostly boarded shut. There was a town park—a square of unmown lawn with an unpainted gazebo set on it. Tourists had got here ahead of him and had gone again.

He walked out to where the road dead-ended at the tip of the peninsula. It was unmarked, unexceptional. The paving petered out and a graveled road kept on a little way through weeds and hillocks of dirt. Where the graveled road ended, people had been dumping garbage. He stood up on one of the hillocks and looked to the land's end across the dump. There was no beach, just a strip of tidal mud. The salt water of the strait lay flat and gray as sheet metal. The crossing was forty-three nautical miles—there was no seeing Vancouver Island.

He went back along the road through the downtown, looking up the short cross-streets for the truer town: the hardware store, the grocery, the lumber yard. An AG market had a computerized checkout that was broken, perhaps had been broken for months or years—a clunky mechanical cash register sat on top of the scanner, and a long list of out-of-stock goods was taped across the LED display.

Jay bought a carton of cottage cheese and stood outside eating it with the spoon that folded out of his Swiss army knife. He read from a free tourist leaflet that had been stacked up in a wire rack at the front of the store. The paper of the top copy was yellowed, puckered. On the first inside page was a peninsula map of grand scale naming all the shallow lakes, the graveled roads, the minor capes and inlets. There was a key of symbols: bird scratchings were the nesting grounds of the snowy plover, squiggly ovoids were privately held oyster beds, a stylized anchor marked a public boat launch and a private anchorage on the eastern, the protected shoreline. Offshore there, on the white paper of the strait, stood a non-specific fish, a crab, a gaffrigged daysailer, and off the oceanside, a long-necked razor clam and a kite. He could guess the boat launch was shut down: recreational boating and fishing had been banned in the strait and in Puget Sound for years. There was little likelihood any oysters had been grown in a while, nor kites flown, clams dug.

Bud's Country Store sold bathtubs and plastic pipe, clamming guns, Coleman lanterns, two-by-fours and plywood, marine supplies, tea pots, towels, rubber boots. What they didn't have they would order, though it was understood delivery might be uncertain. He bought a weekly paper printed seventy miles away in Port Angeles, a day-old copy of the Seattle

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daily, and a canister of butane, and walked up the road again to the trailer park. *Four Pines RV Village* was painted on a driftwood log mounted high on posts to make a gateway. If there had been pines, they'd been cut down. Behind the arch was a weedy lawn striped with whitish oyster-shell driveways. Stubby posts held out electrical outlets, water couplings, waste water hoses. Some of them were dismantled. There was a gunite building with two steamed-up windows: a shower house, maybe, or a laundromat, or both. The trailer next to the building was a single-wide with a tip-out and a roofed wooden porch. *Office* was painted on the front of it in a black childish print across the fiberglass. There was one other trailer parked along the fence, somebody's permanent home, an old round-back with its tires hidden behind rusted aluminum skirting.

Jay dug out a form letter and held it against his notebook while he wrote across the bottom, "I'd just like to pitch a tent, stay out of your way, and pay when I use the shower. Thanks." He looked at what he had written, added exclamation points, went up to the porch and knocked, waiting awkwardly with the letter in his hand. The girl who opened the door was thin and pale; she had a small face, small features. She looked at him without looking in his eyes. Maybe she was eleven or twelve years old.

He smiled. This was always a moment he hated, doubly so if it was a child—he would need to do it twice. He held out the letter, held out his smile with it. Her eyes jumped to his face and then back to the letter with a look that was difficult to pin down—confusion or astonishment, and then something like preoccupation, as if she had lost sight of him standing there. It was common to get a quick shake of the head, a closed door. He didn't know what the girl's look meant. He kept smiling gently. Several women at different times had told him he had a sweet smile. That was the word they all had used—"sweet." He usually tried to imagine they meant peaceable, without threat.

After a difficult silence, the girl may have remembered him standing there. She finally put out her hand for the letter. He hated waiting while she read it. He looked across the trailer park to a straggly line of scotch broom on the other side of the fence. In a minute she held out the paper to him again without looking in his face. "You have to ask my dad." Her voice was small, low.

He didn't take the letter back yet. He raised his eyebrows in a questioning way. Often it was easier from this point. She would be watching him for those kinds of nonverbal language. He was "keeping a personal silence," he had written in the letter.

"Over in the shower house," she said. She had fine brown hair that hung straight down to her shoulders, and straight bangs she hid behind. Jay glanced toward the gunite building with deliberate, self-conscious

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hesitation, then made a helpless gesture. The girl may have looked at him from behind her scrim of bangs. "I can ask him," she said, murmuring.

Her little rump was flat, in corduroy pants too big for her. She had kept his letter, and she swung it fluttering in her hand as he followed her to the shower house. A man knelt on the concrete floor, hunched up at the foot of the hot water tank. His pants rode low, baring some of the shallow crack of his buttocks. He looked tall, heavy-boned, though there wasn't much weight on him now, if there ever had been.

"Dad," the girl said.

He had pulled apart the thick fiberglass blanket around the heater to get at the thermostat. His head was shoved inside big loose wings of the blanketing. "What," he said, without bringing his head out.

"He wants to put up a tent," she said. "Here, read this." She shook Jay's letter.

He rocked back on his hips and his heels and rubbed his scalp with a big hand. There were bits of fiberglass, like mica chips, in his hair. "Shit," he said loudly, addressing the hot water heater. Then he stood slowly, hitching up his pants above the crack. He was very tall, six and a half feet or better, bony-faced. He looked at the girl. "What," he said.

She pushed the letter at him silently. Jay smiled, made a slight, apologetic grimace when the man's eyes finally came around to him. It was always a hard thing trying to tell by people's faces whether they'd help him out or not. This one looked him over briefly, silently, then took the letter and looked at it without much attention. He kept picking fiberglass out of his hair and his skin, and afterward looking under his fingernails for traces of it. "I read about this in *Time*," he said at one point, but it was just recognition, not approval, and he didn't look at Jay when he said it. He kept reading the letter and scrubbing at the bits of fiberglass. It wasn't clear if he had spoken to Jay or to the girl.

Finally he looked at Jay. "You're walking around the world, huh." It evidently wasn't a question, so Jay stood there and waited. "I don't see what good will come of it—except after you're killed you might get on the night news." He had a look at his mouth, smugness, or bitterness. Jay smiled again, shrugging.

The man looked at him. Finally he said, "You know anything about water heaters? If you can fix it, I'd let you have a couple of dollars for the shower meter. Yes? No?"

Jay looked at the heater. It was propane-fired. He shook his head, tried to look apologetic. It wasn't quite a lie. He didn't want to spend the rest of the day fiddling with it for one hot shower.

"Shit," the man said mildly. He hitched at his pants with the knuckles of both hands. Jay's letter was still in one fist and he looked down at it

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inattentively when the paper made a faint crackly noise against his hip. "Here," he said, holding the sheet out. Jay had fifty or sixty clean copies of it in a plastic ziplock in his backpack. He went through a lot of them when he was on the move. He took the rumpled piece of paper, folded it, pushed it down in a front pocket.

"I had bums come in after dark and use my water," the man said. He waited as if that was something Jay might want to respond to. Jay waited too.

"Well, keep off to the edge by the fence," the man warned him. "You can put up a tent for free, I guess, it's not like we're crowded, but leave the trailer spaces clear anyway. I got locks on the utilities now, so you pay me if you want water, or need to take a crap, and don't take one in the bushes or I'll have to kick you out of here."

Jay nodded. He stuck out his hand and after a very brief moment the man shook it. The man's hand was prickly, damp.

"You show him, Mare," he said to the girl. He tapped her shoulder with his fingertips lightly, but his eyes were on Jay.

Jay followed the young girl, Mare, across the trailer park, across the wet grass and broken-shell driveways to a low fence of two-by-fours and wire that marked the property line. The grass was mowed beside the fence but left to sprout in clumps along the wire and around the wooden uprights. There was not much space between the fence and the last row of driveways. If anybody ever parked a motor home in the driveway behind him, he'd have the exhaust pipe in his vestibule. The girl put her hands in her corduroy pockets and stubbed the grass with the toe of her shoe. "Here?" she asked him. He nodded and swung his pack down onto the grass.

Mare watched him make his camp. She didn't try to help him. She was comfortably silent. When he had everything ordered, he looked at her and smiled briefly and sat down on his little sitz pad on the grass. He took out his notebook but he didn't work on the journal. He pulled around a clean page and began a list of the materials he would need for beginning the boat. He wrote down substitutes when he could think of them, in case he had trouble getting his first choice. He planned to cross the strait to Vancouver Island and then sail east and north through the Gulf Islands and the Strait of Georgia, across the Queen Charlotte Strait and then up through the inland passage to Alaska. He hadn't figured out yet how he would get across the Bering Strait to Siberia—whether he would try to sail across in this boat he would build, or if he'd barter it up there to get some other craft, or a ride. It might take him all winter to build the skipjack, all summer to sail it stop and go up the west coast of Canada and Alaska, and then he would need to wait for summer again before

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crossing the Bering Strait. He'd have time to find out what he wanted to do before he got to it.

The girl after a while approached him silently and squatted down on her heels so she could see what he was writing. She didn't ask him about the list. She read it over and then looked off toward her family's trailer. She kept crouching there beside him, balancing lightly.

"Do you think it's helping yet?" she asked in a minute. She whispered it, looking at him sideward through her long bangs.

He raised his eyebrows questioningly.

"They're still fighting," she murmured. "Aren't they?"

His mother had written to the Oklahoma draft board pleading Jay's only-child status, but by then the so-called Third-World's War was taking a few thousand American lives a day and they weren't exempting anyone. Within a few weeks of his eighteenth birthday, they sent him to the Israeli front.

The tour of duty was four years at first, then extended to six. He thought they would extend it again, but after six years few of them were alive anyway, and they sent him home on a C31 full of cremation canisters. He sat on the toilet in the tail of the plane and swallowed all the pills he had, three at a time, until they were gone. The illegal-drug infrastructure had come overseas with the war and eventually he had learned he could sleep and not dream if he took Nembutal, which was easy to get. Gradually after that he had begun to take Dexamyl to wake up from the Nembutal, Librium to smooth the jitters out of the Dexamyl, Percodan to get high, Demerol when he needed to come down quickly from the high, Dexamyl again if the Demerol took him down too far. He thought he would be dead by the time the plane landed but his body remained inexplicably, persistently, resistant to death. He wound up in a Delayed Stress Syndrome Inpatient Rehab Center which was housed in a prison. He was thirty years old when the funding for the DSS Centers was dropped in favor of research that might lead to a Stealth aircraft carrier. Jay was freed to walk and hitchhike from the prison in Idaho to his mother's house in Tulsa. She had been dead for years but he stood in the street in front of the house and waited for something to happen, a memory or a sentiment, to connect him to his childhood and adolescence. Nothing came. He had been someone else for a long time.

He was still standing on the curb there after dark when a man came out of the house behind him. The man had a flashlight but he didn't click it on. He came over to where Jay stood.

"You should get inside," he said to Jay. "They'll be coming around pretty soon, checking." He spoke quietly. He might have meant a curfew. Tulsa had been fired on a few times by planes flying up to or back from

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the Kansas missile silos, out of bases in Haiti—crazy terrorists of the crazy Jorge Ruiz government. Probably there was a permanent brownout and a curfew here.

Jay said, "Okay," but he didn't move. He didn't know where he would go anyway. He was cold and needing sleep. There was an appeal in the possibility of arrest.

The man looked at him in the darkness. "You can come inside my house," he said, after he had looked at Jay.

He had a couch in a small room at the front of his house, and Jay slept on it without taking off his clothes. In the daylight the next morning he lay on the couch and looked out the window to his mother's house across the street.

The man who had taken him in was a Quaker named Bob Settleman. He had a son who was on an aircraft carrier in the Indian Ocean, and a daughter who was in a federal prison serving a ten year sentence for failure to report. Jay went with him to a First Day Meeting. There was nothing much to it. People sat silently. After a while an old woman stood and said something about the droughts and cold weather perhaps reflecting God's unhappiness with the state of the world. But that was the only time anyone mentioned God. Three other people rose to speak. One said he was tired of being the only person who remembered to shut the blackout screens in the Meeting Room before they locked up. Then, after a long silence, a woman stood and expressed her fear that an entire generation had been desensitized to violence, by decades of daily video coverage of the war. She spoke gently, in a trembling voice, just a few plain sentences. It didn't seem to matter a great deal, the words she spoke. While she was speaking, Jay felt something come into the room. The woman's voice, some quality in it, seemed to charge the air with its manifest, exquisitely painful truth. After she had finished, there was another long silence. Then Bob Settleman stood slowly and told about watching Jay standing on the curb after dark. He seemed to be relating it intangibly to what had been said about the war. "I could see he was in some need," Bob said, gesturing urgently. Jay looked at his hands. He thought he should be embarrassed, but nothing like that arose in him. He could still feel the palpable trembling of the woman's voice—in the air, in his bones.

Afterward, walking away from the Meeting house, Bob looked at his feet and said, as if it was an apology, "It's been a long time since I've been at a Meeting that was Gathered into the Light like that. I guess I got swept up in it."

Jay didn't look at him. After a while he said, "It's okay." He didn't ask anything. He felt he knew, without asking, what Gathered into the Light meant.

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He stayed in Tulsa, warehousing for a laundry products distributor. He kept going to the First Day Meetings with Bob. He found it was true, Meetings were rarely Gathered. But he liked the long silences anyway, and the unpredictability of the messages people felt compelled to share. For a long time, he didn't speak himself. He listened without hearing any voice whispering inside him. But finally he did hear one. When he stood, he felt the long silence Gathering, until the trembling words he spoke came out on the air as Truth.

"If somebody could walk far enough, they'd have to come to the end of the war, eventually."

He had, by now, an established web of support: a New York Catholic priest who banked his receipts from the journal subscriptions, kept his accounts, filed his taxes, wired him expense money when he asked for it; a Canadian rare-seeds collective willing to receive his mail, sort it, bundle it up and send it to him whenever he supplied them with an address; a Massachusetts Monthly Meeting of Friends whose members had the work of typing from the handwritten pages he sent them, printing, collating, stapling, mailing the 10,000 copies of his sometimes-monthly writings. He had a paid subscription list of 1,651, a non-paid "mailing list" of 8,274. Some of those were churches, environmental groups, cooperatives, many were couples, so the real count of persons who supported him was greater by a factor of three or four, maybe. Many of them were people he had met, walking. He hadn't walked, yet, in the Eastern Hemisphere. If he lived long enough to finish what he had started, he thought he could hope for a total list as high as fifty or sixty thousand names. A Chilean who had been a delegate at the failed peace conferences in Surinam had kept a year-long public silence as a protest of Jay's arrest and bad treatment in Colombia. And he knew of one other world-peace-walker he had inspired, a Cuban Nobel chemist who had been the one primarily featured in *Time*. He wasn't fooled into believing it was an important circle of influence. He had to view it in the context of the world. Casualties were notoriously underreported, but at least as many people were killed in a given day, directly and indirectly by the war, as made up his optimistic future list of subscribers. It may have been he kept at it because he had been doing it too long now to stop. It was what he did, who he was. It had been a long time since he had felt the certainty and clarity of a Meeting that was Gathered into the Light.

On the Naniamuk peninsula, he scouted out a few broken-down sheds, and garages with overgrown driveways, and passed entreating notes to the owners. He needed a roof. He expected rain in this part of the world about every day.

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One woman had a son dead in India and another son who had been listed AWOL or MIA in the interior of Brazil for two years. She asked Jay if he had walked across Brazil yet. *Yes*, he wrote quickly, *eight months there.* She didn't ask him anything else—nothing about the land or the weather or the fighting. She showed him old photos of both her sons without asking if he had seen the lost one among the refugees in the cities and villages he had walked through. She lent him the use of her dilapidated garage, and the few cheap tools he found in disarray inside it.

The girl, Mare, came unexpectedly after a couple of days and watched him lofting the deck and hull bottom panels onto plywood. It had been raining a little. She stood under her own umbrella a while, without coming in close enough to shelter under the garage roof. But gradually she came in near him and studied what he was doing. A look rose in her face—distractedness, as before on the porch of her trailer, and then fear, or something like grief. He didn't know what to make of these looks of hers.

"You're building a boat," she said, low voiced.

He stopped working a minute and looked at the two pieces of plywood he had laid end to end. He was marking and lining them with a straight edge and a piece of curving batten. He had gone across the Florida Strait in a homemade plywood skipjack, had sailed it around the coast of Cuba to Haiti, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and then across the channel to Yucatan. And later he had built a punt to cross the mouths of the Amazon. A Cuban refugee, a fisherman, had helped him build the Caribbean boat, and the punt had been a simple thing, hardly more than a raft. This was the first time he had tried to build a skipjack without help, but he had learned he could do about anything if he had time enough to make mistakes, undo them, set them right. He nodded, yes, he was building a boat.

"There are mines in the strait," Mare said, dropping her low voice down.

He smiled slightly, giving her a face that belittled the problem. He had seen mines in the Yucatan channel too, and in the strait off Florida. His boat had slid by them, ridden over them. They were triggered for the heavy war ships and the armored oil tankers.

He went on working. Mare watched him seriously, without saying anything else. He thought she would leave when she saw how slow the boat-making went, but she stayed on in the garage, handing him tools, and helping him to brace the batten against the nails when he lofted the deck piece. At dusk she walked with him up the streets to the Four Pines. There was a fine rain falling still, and she held her umbrella high up so he could get under it if he hunched a little.

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In the morning she was waiting for him, sitting on the porch of her trailer when he tramped across the wet grass toward the street. Since Colombia, he had had a difficulty with waking early. He had to depend on his bladder, usually, to force him out of the sleeping bag, then he was slow to feel really awake, his mouth and eyes thick, heavy, until he had washed his face, eaten something, walked a while. He saw it was something like that with the girl. She sat hunkered up on the top step, resting her chin on her knees, clasping her arms about her thin legs. Under her eyes, the tender skin was puffy, dark. Her hair stuck out uncombed. She didn't speak to him. She came stiffly down from the porch and fell in beside him, with her eyes fixed on the rubber toe caps of her shoes. She had a brown lunch sack clutched in one hand and the other hand sunk in the pocket of her corduroys.

They walked down the paved road and then the graveled streets to where the boat garage was. Their walking made a quiet scratching sound. There was no one else out. Jay thought he could hear the surf beating on the ocean side of the peninsula, but maybe not. He heard a dim, continuous susurration. They were half a mile from the beach. Maybe what he heard was wind moving in the trees and the grass, or the whisperings of the snowy plover, nesting in the brush above the tidal flats, on the strait side of the peninsula.

He had not padlocked the garage—a pry-bar would have got anybody in through the small side door in a couple of minutes. He pulled up the rollaway front door, let the light in on the tools, the sheets of plywood. Mare put her lunch down on a sawhorse and stood looking at the lofted pieces, the hull bottom and deck panels drawn on the plywood. He would make those cuts today. He manhandled one of the sheets up off the floor onto the sawhorses. Mare took hold of one end silently. It occurred to him that he could have gotten the panels cut out without her, but it would be easier with her there to hold the big sheets of wood steady under the saw.

He cut the deck panel slowly with hand tools—a brace and bit to make an entry for the keyhole saw, a ripsaw for the long outer cuts. When he was most of the way along the straight finish of the starboard side, on an impulse he gave the saw over to Mare and came around to the other side to hold the sheet down for her. She looked at him once shyly from behind her long bangs and then stood at his place before the wood, holding the saw in both hands. She hadn't drawn a saw in her life, he could tell that, but she'd been watching him. She pushed the saw into the cut he had started and drew it up slow and wobbly. She was holding her mouth out in a tight, flat line, all concentration. He had to smile, watching her.

They ate lunch sitting on the sawhorses at the front of the garage. Jay had carried a carton of yogurt in the pocket of his coat and he ate that

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slowly with his spoon. Mare offered him part of her peanut butter sandwich, and quartered pieces of a yellow apple. He shook his head, shrugging, smiling thinly. She considered his face, and then looked away.

"I get these little dreams," she said in a minute, low voiced, with apple in her mouth.

He had a facial expression he relied on a good deal, a questioning look. *What? Say again? Explain.* She glanced swiftly sideward at his look and then down at her fingers gathered in her lap. "They're not dreams, I guess. I'm not asleep. I just get them all of a sudden. I see something that's happened, or something that hasn't happened yet. Things remind me." She looked at him again cautiously through her bangs. "When I saw you on the porch, when you gave me the letter, I remembered somebody else who gave me a letter before. I think it was a long time ago."

He shook his head, took the notepad from his shirt pocket and wrote a couple of lines about *déjà vu*. He would have written more but she was reading while he wrote and he felt her stiffening, looking away.

"I know what that is," she said, lowering her face. "It isn't that. Everybody gets that."

He waited silently. There wouldn't have been anything to say anyway. She picked at the corduroy on the front of her pant legs. After a while she said, whispering, "I remember things that happened to other people, but they were me. I think I might be dreaming other people's lives, or the dreams are what I did before, when I was alive a different time, or when I'll be somebody else, later on." Her fingernails kept picking at the cord. "I guess you don't get dreams like that." Her eyes came up to him. "Nobody else does, I guess." She looked away. "I do though. I get them a lot. I just don't tell anymore." Her mouth was small, drawn up. She looked toward him again. "I can tell you, though."

Before she had finished telling him, he had thought of an epilepsy, *Le Petit Absentia*, maybe it was called. He had seen it once in a witch-child in Haiti, a girl who fell into a brief, staring trance a hundred times a day. A neurologist had written to him, naming it from the description he had read in Jay's journal. He could write to the neurologist, ask if this was *Le Petit* again. Maybe there was a simple way to tell, a test, or a couple of things to look for. Of course, maybe it wasn't that. It might only be a fancy, something she'd invented, an attention-getter. But her look made him sympathetic. He pushed her bangs back, kissed her smooth brow solemnly. *It's okay*, he said by his kiss, by his hand lightly on her bangs. *I won't tell.*

There hadn't been a long Labor Day weekend for years. It was one of the minor observances scratched from the calendar by the exigencies of war. But people who were tied in with the school calendar still observed

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the first weekend of September as a sort of holiday, a last hurrah before the opening Monday of the school year. Some of them still came to the beach.

The weather by good luck was fair, the abiding peninsula winds balmy, sunlit, so there were a couple of small trailers and a few tents in the RV park, and a no-vacancy sign at the motel Saturday morning by the time the fog was burned off.

Jay spent both days on the lawn in front of the town's gazebo, behind a stack of old journals and a big posterboard display he had pasted up, with an outsized rewording of his form letter, and clippings from newspapers and from *Time*. He put out a hat on the grass in front of him, with a couple of seed dollars in it. His personal style of buskering was diffident, self-conscious. He kept his attention mostly on his notebook, in his lap. He sketched from memory the archway at the front of the RV Park, the humpbacked old trailer, the girl, Mare's, thin face. He made notes to do with the boat, and fiddled with an op-ed piece he would send to *Time*, trying to follow up on the little publicity they'd given the Cuban chemist. The op-ed would go in his October journal, whether *Time* took it or not, and the sketches would show up there too, in the margins of his daybook entries, or on the cover. He printed other people's writings too, things that came in his mail—poetry, letters, meeting notices, back page news items pertaining to peace issues, casualty and armament statistics sent at rare intervals by an anonymous letter writer with a Washington, D.C. postmark—but most of the pages were his own work. On bureaucratic forms he entered *Journalist* as his occupation without feeling he was misrepresenting anything. He liked to write. His writing had gotten gradually better since he had been doing the journal—sometimes he thought it was not from the practice at writing, but the practice at silence.

Rarely somebody stooped to pick up a journal, or put money in his hat, or both. Those people he tried to make eye contact with, smiling gently by way of inviting them in. He wouldn't get any serious readers, serious talkers, probably, on a holiday weekend in a beach town, but you never knew. He was careful not to look at the others, the bypassers, but he kept track of them peripherally. He had been arrested quite a few times, assaulted a few. And since Colombia, he suffered from a chronic fear.

Mare came and sat with him on Sunday. He didn't mind having her there. She was comfortable with his silence; she seemed naturally silent herself, much of the time. She read from old copies of his journal and shared the best parts with him as if he hadn't been the writer, the editor, holding a page out for him silently and waiting, watching, while he read to the end. Then her marginalia were terse, absolute: "Ick." "I'm glad." "She shouldn't have gone." "I'd never do that."

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After quite a while, she had him read what he had written about a town in the Guatemala highlands where he had spent a couple of months, and then she said, in a changed way, timid, earnest, "I lived there before. But I was a different person."

He had not got around to writing anyone about the epilepsy after he'd lost that first strong feeling of its possibility. His silence invited squirrels, he knew that, though it made him tired, unhappy, thinking of it. He was tired now, suddenly, and annoyed with her. He shook his head, let her see a flat, skeptical smile.

"Mare!"

The father came across the shaggy grass moving swiftly, his arms swinging in a stiff way, elbows akimbo. Jay stood up warily.

"I'm locked out of the damn house," the man said, not looking at Jay. "Where's your key?"

Mare got up from the grass, dug around in her pockets and brought out a key with a fluorescent pink plastic keeper. He closed his fingers on it, made a vague gesture with the fist. "I about made up my mind to bust a window," he said. "I was looking for you." He was annoyed.

Mare put her hands in her pockets, looked at her feet. "I'm helping him stop the war," she said, murmuring.

The man's eyes went to Jay and then the posterboard sign, the hat, the stacked-up journals. His face kept hold of that look of annoyance, but took on something else too, maybe it was just surprise. "He's putting up signs and hustling for money, is what it looks like he's doing," he said, big and arrogant. For a while longer he stood there looking at the sign as if he were reading it. Maybe he was. He had a manner of standing—shifting his weight from foot to foot and hitching at his pants every so often with the knuckles of his hands.

"I got a kidney shot out, in North Africa," he said suddenly. "But there's not much fighting there anymore, that front's moved south or somewhere. I don't know who's got that ground now. They can keep it, whoever." He had a long hooked nose, bony ridges below his eyes, a wide, lipless mouth. Strong features. Jay could see nothing of him in Mare's small pale face. It wasn't evident, how they were with each other. Jay saw her now watching her dad through her bangs, with something like the shyness she had with everyone else.

"Don't be down here all day," her dad said to her, gesturing again with the fist he had closed around the housekey. He looked at Jay but he didn't say anything else. He shifted his weight one more time and then walked off long-strided, swinging his long arms. He was tall enough some of the tourists looked at him covertly after he'd passed them. Mare watched him too. Then she looked at Jay, a ducking, sideward look. He thought she was embarrassed by her dad. He shrugged. *It's okay*. But

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that wasn't it. She said, pulling in her thin shoulders timidly, "There is a lake there named Negro because the water is so dark." She had remained focused on his disbelief, waiting to say this small proving thing about Guatemala. And it was true enough to shake him a little. There was a Lago Negro in about every country below the U.S. border, he remembered that in a minute. But there was a long startled moment before that, when he only saw the little black lake in the highlands, in Guatemala, and Mare, dark faced, in a dugout boat paddling away from the weedy shore.

He had the store rip four long stringers out of a clear fir board and then he kerfed the stringers every three inches along their lengths. With the school year started he didn't have Mare to hold the long pieces across the saw horses. He got the cuts done slowly, single-handed, bracing the bouncy long wood with his knee.

Mare's dad came up the road early in the day. Jay thought he wasn't looking for the garage. There was a flooded cranberry field on the other side of the road and he was watching the people getting in the crop from it. There were two men and three women wading slowly up and down in green rubber hip waders, stripping off the berries by hand into big plastic buckets. Mare's dad, walking along the road, watched them. But when he came even with the garage he turned suddenly and walked up the driveway. Jay stopped what he was doing and waited, holding the saw. Mare's dad stood just inside the rollaway door, shifting his weight, knuckling his hips.

"I heard you were building a boat," he said, looking at the wood, not at Jay. "You never said how long you wanted to camp, but I didn't figure it would be long enough to build a boat." Jay thought he knew where this was headed. He'd been hustled along plenty of times before this. But it didn't go that way. The man looked at him. "In that letter you showed, I figured you meant you could talk if you wanted to." He sounded annoyed, as he had been on Labor Day weekend with Mare. "Now I heard your tongue was cut off," he said, lifting his chin, reproachful.

Jay kept standing there holding the saw, waiting. He hadn't been asked anything. The man dropped his eyes. He turned partway from Jay and looked over his shoulder toward the cranberry bog, the people working there. There was a long stiff silence.

"She's a weird kid," he said suddenly. "You figured that out by now, I guess." His voice was loud; he may not have had soft speaking in him anywhere. "I'd have her to a psychiatrist, but I can't afford it." He hitched at his pants with the backs of both hands. "I guess she likes you because you don't say anything. She can tell you whatever she wants and you're not gonna tell her she's nuts." He looked at Jay. "You think she's nuts?"

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His face had a sorrowful aspect now, his brows drawn up in a heavy pleat above the bridge of his nose.

Jay looked at the saw. He tested the row of teeth against the tips of his fingers and kept from looking at the man. He realized he didn't know his name, first or last, or if he had a wife. Where was Mare's mother?

The man blew out a puffing breath through his lips. "I guess she is," he said unhappily. Jay ducked his head, shrugged. *I don't know.* He had been writing about Mare lately—pages that would probably show up in the journal, in the October mailing. He had spent a lot of time wondering about her, and then writing it down. This was something new to wonder about. He had thought her dad was someone else, not this big sorrowful man looking for reassurance from a stranger who camped in his park.

A figure of jets passed over them suddenly, flying inland from the ocean. There were six. They flew low, dragging a screaming roar, a shudder, through the air. Mare's dad didn't look up.

"She used to tell people these damn dreams of hers all the time," the man said, after the noise was past. "I know I never broke her of it, she just got sly who she tells them to. She never tells me anymore." He stood there silently looking at the cranberry pickers. "The last one she told me," he said, in his heavy, unquiet voice, "was how she'd be killed dead when she was twelve years old." He looked over at Jay. "She didn't tell you that yet," he said, when he saw Jay's face. He smiled in a bitter way. "She was about eight, I guess, when she told me that one." He thought about it and then he added, "She's twelve now. She was twelve in June." He made a vague gesture with both hands, a sort of open-palms shrugging. Then he pushed his hands down in his back pockets. He kept them there while he shifted his weight in that manner he had, almost a rocking back and forth.

Watching him, Jay wondered suddenly if Mare might not put herself in the path of something deadly, to make sure this dream was a true one—a proof for her dad. He wondered if her dad had thought of that.

"I don't know where she gets her ideas," the man said, making a pained face, "if it's from TV or books or what, but she told me when she got killed it'd be written up, and in the long run it'd help get the war ended. Before that, she never had noticed we were even in a war." He looked at Jay wildly. "Maybe I'm nuts too, but here you are, peace-peddling in our backyard, and when I saw you with those magazines you write, I started to wonder what was going on. I started to wonder if this is a damn different world than I've been believing all my life." His voice had begun to rise so by the last few words he sounded plaintive, teary. Jay had given up believing in God the year he was eighteen. He didn't know what it was that Gathered a Meeting into the Light, but he didn't think

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it was God. It occurred to him, he couldn't have told Mare's dad where the borders were of the world he, Jay, believed in.

"I don't have a reason for telling you this," the man said after a silence. He had brought his voice down again so he sounded just agitated, defensive. "Except I guess I wondered if I was nuts, and I figured I'd ask somebody who couldn't answer." His mouth spread out flat in a humorless grin. He took his hands out of his pockets, hitched up his pants. "I thought about kicking you on down the road, but I guess it wouldn't matter. If it isn't you, it'll be somebody else. And"—his eyes jumped away from Jay—"I was afraid she might quick do something to get herself killed, if she knew you were packing up." He waited, looking off across the road. Then he looked at Jay. "I've been worrying, lately, that she'll get killed all right, one way or the other, either it'll come true on its own or she'll make it."

They stood together in silence in the dim garage, looking at the cut out pieces of Jay's boat. He had the deck and hull bottom pieces, the bulkheads, the transom, the knee braces cut out. You could see the shape of the boat in some of them, in the curving lines of the cuts.

"I guess you couldn't taste anything without a tongue," the man said after a while. He looked at Jay. "I'd miss that more than the talking." He knuckled his hips and walked off toward the road. All his height was in his legs. He walked fast with a loose, sloping gait on those long legs.

In the afternoon Jay took a clam shovel out of the garage and walked down to the beach. The sand was black and oily from an offshore spill or a sinking. There wasn't any debris on the low tide, just the oil. Maybe on the high tide there would be wreckage, or oil-fouled birds. He walked along the edge of the surf on the wet black sand looking for clam sign. There wasn't much. He dug a few holes without finding anything. He hadn't expected to. Almost at dusk he saw somebody walking toward him from way down the beach. Gradually it became Mare. She didn't greet him. She turned alongside him silently and walked with him, studying the sand. She carried a denim knapsack that pulled her shoulders down: blocky shapes of books, a lunch box. She hadn't been home yet. If she had gone to the garage and not found him there, she didn't say so.

He touched the blade of the shovel to the sand every little while, looking in the pressure circle for the stipple of clams. He didn't look at Mare. Something, maybe it was a clam sign, irised in the black sheen on the sand. He dug a fast hole straight down, slinging the wet mud sideways. Mare crouched out of the way, watching the hole. "I see it!" She dropped on the sand and pushed her arm in the muddy hole, brought it out again reflexively. Blood sprang along the cut of the razor-shell,

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bright red. She held her hands together in her lap while her face brought up a look, a slow unfolding of surprise and fear. Jay reached for her, clasping both her hands between his palms, and in a moment she saw him again. "It cut me," she said, and started to cry. The tears maybe weren't about her hand.

He washed out the cut in a puddle of salt water. He didn't have anything to wrap around it. He picked up the clam shovel in one hand and held onto her cut hand with the other. They started back along the beach. He could feel her pulse in the tips of his fingers. *What did you dream,* he wanted to say.

It had begun to be dark. There was no line dividing the sky from the sea, just a griseous smear and below it the cream-colored lines of surf. Ahead of them Jay watched something rolling in the shallow water. It came up on the beach and then rode out again. The tide was rising. Every little while the surf brought the thing in again. It was pale, a driftlog, it rolled heavily in the shallow combers. Then it wasn't a log. Jay let down the shovel and Mare's hand and waded out to it. The water was cold, dark. He took the body by its wrist and dragged it up on the sand. It had been chewed on, or shattered. The legs were gone, and the eyes, the nose. He couldn't tell if it was a man or a woman. He dragged it way up on the beach, on the dry sand, above the high tide line. Mare stood where she was and watched him.

He got the clam shovel and went back to the body and began to dig a hole beside it. The sand was silky, some of it slipped down and tried to fill the grave as he dug. In the darkness, maybe he was shoveling out the same hole over and over. The shovel handle was sticky, from Mare's blood on his palms. When he looked behind him, he saw Mare sitting on the sand, huddled with her thin knees pulled up, waiting. She held her hurt hand with the other one, cradled.

When he had buried the legless body, he walked back to her and she stood up and he took her hand again and they went on along the beach in the darkness. He was cold. His wet shoes and his jeans grated with sand. The cut on Mare's hand felt sticky, hot, where he clasped his palm against it. She said, in a whisper, "I dreamed this, once." He couldn't see her face. He looked out but he couldn't see the water, only hear it in the black air, a ceaseless, numbing murmur. He remembered the look that had come in her face when she had first seen his boat-building. *There are mines in the strait.* He wondered if that was when she had dreamed this moment, this white body rolling up on the sand.

He imagined Mare dead. It wasn't hard. He didn't know what kind of a death she could have that would end the war, but he didn't have any trouble seeing her dead. He had seen a lot of dead or dying children, written about them. He didn't know why imagining Mare's thin body,

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legless, buried in sand, brought up in his mouth the remembered salt taste of tears, or blood, or the sea.

"I know," he said, though what came out was shapeless, ill-made, a sound like *Ah woe.* Mare didn't look at him. But in a while she leaned in to him in the darkness and whispered against his cheek. "It's okay," she said, holding on to his hand. "I won't tell."

He had sent off the pages of his October journal already, and Mare was in them, and Lago Negro, and the father standing shifting his feet, not looking up as the jets screamed over him. It occurred to Jay suddenly, it would not matter much, the manner of her dying. She had dreamed her own death and he had written it down, and when she was dead he would write that, and her death would charge the air with its manifest, exquisitely painful truth. ●

Mage and Lady

for J. D. B.

Finding he could fly away
leaving only a flurry of dragon scales
or, another time, that he listened
to all her most secret wishes,
perched in her earring
a topaz bee
on a carved jade leaf,
and at last finding
his eyes weren't always green,
she wondered
what else he hadn't told her
yet.

—Mary A. Turzillo

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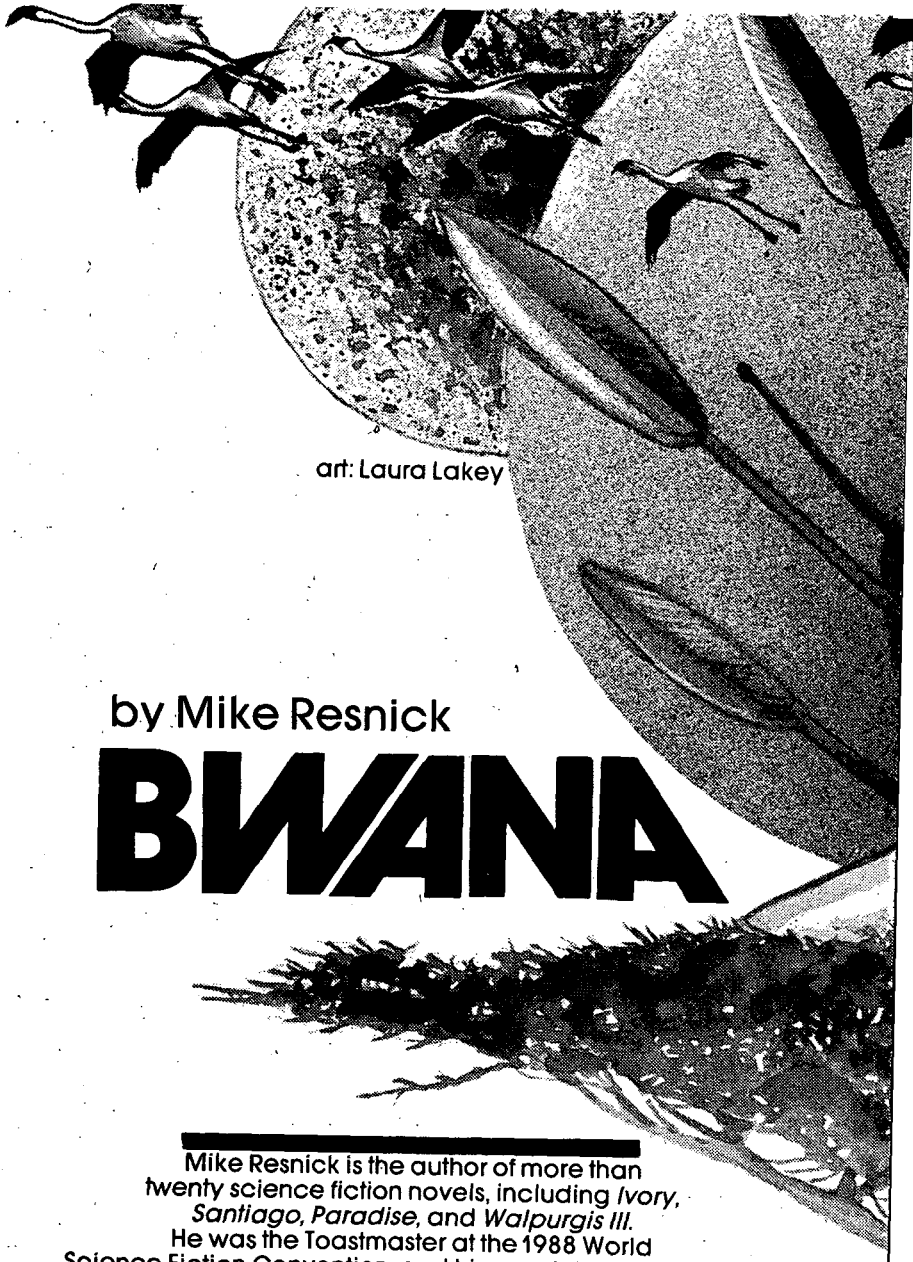

art: Laura Lakey

by Mike Resnick

BWANA

Mike Resnick is the author of more than twenty science fiction novels, including *Ivory, Santiago, Paradise,* and *Walpurgis III.* He was the Toastmaster at the 1988 World Science Fiction Convention, and his novelette, "Kirinyaga," was both a finalist for the Nebula award and the winner of the 1988 Hugo award.

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Ngai rules the universe from His throne atop Kirinyaga, which men call Mount Kenya, and on His sacred mountain the beasts of the field roam free and share the fertile green slopes with His chosen people.

To the first Maasai He gave a spear, and to the first Kamba He gave a bow, but to Gikuyu, who was the first Kikuyu, He gave a digging stick and told him to dwell on the slopes of Kirinyaga. The Kikuyu, said Ngai, could sacrifice goats to read their entrails, and they could sacrifice oxen to thank Him for sending the rains, but they must not molest any of His animals that dwelt on the mountain.

Then one day Gikuyu came to Him and said, "May we not have the bow and arrow, so that we may kill *fisi,* the hyena, in whose body dwell the vengeful souls of evil men?"

And Ngai said that no, the Kikuyu must not molest the hyena, for the hyena's purpose was clear: He had created it to feed upon the lions' leavings, and to take the sick and the elderly from the Kikuyus' *shambas.*

Time passed, and Gikuyu approached the summit of the mountain again. "May we not have the spear, so that we can kill the lion and the leopard, who prey upon our own animals?" he said.

And Ngai said that no, the Kikuyu could not kill the lion or the leopard, for He had created them to hold the population of the grasseaters in check, so that they would not overrun the Kikuyus' fields.

Finally Gikuyu climbed the mountain one last time and said, "We must at least be allowed to kill the elephant, who can destroy a year's harvest in a matter of minutes—but how are we to do so when you have allowed us no weapons?"

Ngai thought long and hard, and finally spoke. "I have decreed that the Kikuyu should till the land, and I will not stain your hands with the blood of my other creatures," announced Ngai. "But because you are my chosen people, and are more important than the beasts that dwell upon my mountain, I will see to it that others come to kill these animals."

"What tribe will these hunters come from?" asked Gikuyu. "By what name will we know them?"

"You will know them by a single word," said Ngai.

When Ngai told him the word by which the hunters would be known, Gikuyu thought He had made a joke, and laughed aloud, and soon forgot the conversation.

But Ngai never jokes when He speaks to the Kikuyu.

We have no elephants or lions or leopards on the Eutopian world of Kirinyaga, for all three species were extinct long before we emigrated from the Kenya that had become so alien to us. But we took the sleek impala, and the majestic kudu, and the mighty buffalo, and the swift

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gazelle—and because we were mindful of Ngai's dictates, we took the hyena and the jackal and the vulture as well.

And because Kirinyaga was designed to be a Utopia in climate as well as in social organization, and because the land was more fertile than Kenya's, and because Maintenance made the orbital adjustments that assured us that the rains would always come on schedule, the wild animals of Kirinyaga, like the domestic animals and the people themselves, grew fruitful and multiplied.

It was only a matter of time before they came into conflict with us. Initially there would be sporadic attacks on our livestock by the hyenas, and once old Koboki's entire harvest was destroyed by a herd of rampaging buffalo, but we took such setbacks with good grace, for Ngai had provided well for us and no one was ever forced to go hungry.

But then, as we reclaimed more and more of our terraformed veldt to be used as farmland, and as the wild animals of Kirinyaga felt the pressure of our land-hungry people, the incidents grew more frequent and more severe.

I was sitting before the fire in my *boma,* waiting for the sun to burn the chill from the morning air and staring out across the acacia-dotted plains, when young Ndemi raced up the winding road from the village.

"Koriba!" he cried. "Come quickly!"

"What has happened?" I asked, rising painfully to my feet.

"Juma has been attacked by *fisi!*" he gasped, striving to regain his breath.

"By one hyena, or many?" I asked.

"One, I think. I do not know."

"Is he still alive?"

"Juma or *fisi?*" asked Ndemi.

"Juma."

"I think he is dead." Ndemi paused. "But you are the *mundumugu.* You can make him live again."

I was pleased that he placed so much faith in his *mundumugu*—his witch doctor—but of course if his companion was truly dead there was nothing I could do about it. I went into my hut, selected some herbs that were especially helpful in combatting infection, added a few *qat* leaves for Juma to chew (for we had no anesthetics on Kirinyaga, and the hallucinogenic trance caused by the *qat* leaves would at least make him forget his pain). All this I placed into a leather pouch that I hung about my neck. Then I emerged from my hut and nodded to Ndemi, who led the way to the *shamba* of Juma's father.

When we arrived, the women were already wailing the death chant, and I briefly examined what was left of poor little Juma's body. One bite from the hyena had taken away most of his face, and a second had totally

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removed his left arm. The hyena had then devoured most of Juma's torso before the villagers finally drove it away.

Koinnage, the paramount chief of the village, arrived a few moments later.

"*Jambo,* Koriba," he greeted me.

"*Jambo,* Koinnage," I replied.

"Something must be done," he said, looking at Juma's body, which was now covered by flies.

"I will place a curse on the hyena," I said, "and tonight I shall sacrifice a goat to Ngai, so that He will welcome Juma's soul."

Koinnage looked uneasy, for his fear of me was great, but finally he spoke: "It is not enough. This is the second healthy boy that the hyenas have taken this month."

"Our hyenas have developed a taste for men," I said. "It is because we leave the old and the infirm out for them."

"Then perhaps we should not leave the old and the sick out any longer."

"We have no choice," I replied. "The Europeans thought it was the mark of savages, and even Maintenance has tried to dissuade us—but we do not have medicine to ease their suffering. What seems barbarous to outsiders is actually an act of mercy. Ever since Ngai gave the first digging-stick to the first Kikuyu, it has always been our tradition to leave the old and the infirm out for the hyenas when it is time for them to die."

"Maintenance has medicines," suggested Koinnage, and I noticed that two of the younger men had edged closer to us and were listening with interest. "Perhaps we should ask them to help us."

"So that they will live a week or a month longer, and then be buried in the ground like Christians?" I said. "You can not be part Kikuyu and part European. That is the reason we came to Kirinyaga in the first place."

"But how wrong could it be to ask only for medicine for our elderly?" asked one of the younger men, and I could see that Koinnage looked relieved now that he himself did not have to pursue the argument.

"If you accept their medicine today, then tomorrow you will be accepting their clothing and their machinery and their god," I replied. "If history has taught us nothing else, it has taught us that." They still seemed unconvinced, so I continued: "Most races look ahead to their Utopia, but the Kikuyu must look *back,* back to a simpler time when we lived in harmony with the land, when we were not tainted with the customs of a society to which we were never meant to belong. I have lived among the Europeans, and gone to school at their universities, and I tell you that you must not listen to the siren song of their technology.

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What works for the Europeans did not work for the Kikuyu when we lived in Kenya, and it will not work for us here on Kirinyaga."

As if to emphasize my statement, a hyena voiced its eerie laugh far off in the veldt. The women stopped wailing and drew closer together.

"But we must do something!" protested Koinnage, whose fear of the hyena momentarily overrode his fear of his *mundumugu*. "We cannot continue to let the beasts of the field destroy our crops and take our children."

I could have explained that there was a temporary imbalance as the grasseaters lowered their birthrate to accommodate their decreased pasturage, and that the hyenas' birthrate would almost certainly adjust within a year, but they would not have understood or believed me. They wanted solutions, not explanations.

"Ngai is testing our courage, to see if we are truly worthy to live on Kirinyaga," I said at last. "Until the time of testing is over, we will arm our children with spears and have them tend the cattle in pairs."

Koinnage shook his head. "The hyenas have developed a taste for men—and two Kikuyu boys, even armed with spears, are no match for a pack of hyenas. Surely Ngai does not want His chosen people to become meals for *fisi*."

"No, He does not," I agreed. "It is the hyenas' nature to kill grasseaters, just as it is our nature to till the fields. I am your *mundumugu*. You must believe me what I tell you that this time of testing will soon pass."

"How soon?" asked another man.

I shrugged. "Perhaps two rains. Perhaps three." The rains come twice a year.

"You are an old man," said the man, mustering his courage to contradict his *mundumugu*. "You have no children, and it is this that gives you patience. But those of us with sons cannot wait for two or three rains wondering each day if they will return from the fields. We must do something *now*."

"I am an old man," I agreed, "and this gives me not only patience, but wisdom."

"You are the *mundumugu*," said Koinnage at last, "and you must face the problem in your way. But I am the paramount chief, and I must face it in mine. I will organize a hunt, and we will kill all the hyenas in the area."

"Very well," I said, for I had foreseen this solution. "Organize your hunt."

"Will you cast the bones and see if we shall be successful?"

"I do not need to cast the bones to foresee the results of your hunt," I replied. "You are farmers, not hunters. You will not be successful."

"You will not give us your support?" demanded another man.

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"You do not need my support," I replied. "I would give you my patience if I could, for that is what you need."

"We were supposed to turn this world into a Utopia," said Koinnage, who had only the haziest understanding of the word, but equated it with good harvests and a lack of enemies. "What kind of Utopia permits children to be devoured by wild animals?"

"You cannot understand what it means to be full until you have been hungry," I answered. "You cannot know what it means to be warm and dry until you have been cold and wet. And Ngai knows, even if you do not, that you cannot appreciate life without death. This is His lesson for you; it will pass."

"It must end *now*," said Koinnage firmly, now that he knew I would not try to prevent his hunt.

I made no further comment, for I knew that nothing I could say would dissuade him. I spent the next few minutes creating a curse for the individual hyena that had killed Juma, and that night I sacrificed a goat in the middle of the village and read in the entrails that Ngai had accepted the sacrifice and welcomed Juma's spirit.

Two days later Koinnage led ten of the village men out to the veldt to hunt the hyenas, while I stayed in my *boma* and prepared for what I knew was inevitable.

It was in late morning that Ndemi—the boldest of the boys in the village, whose courage had made him a favorite of mine—came up the long winding path to visit me.

"*Jambo,* Koriba," he greeted me unhappily.

"*Jambo,* Ndemi," I replied. "What is the matter?"

"They say that I am too young to hunt for *fisi,*" he complained, squatting down next to me.

"They are right."

"But I have practiced my bushcraft every day, and you yourself have blessed my spear."

"I have not forgotten," I said.

"Then why can I not join the hunt?"

"It makes no difference," I said. "They will not kill *fisi.* In fact, they will be very lucky if all of them return unharmed." I paused. "*Then* the troubles will begin."

"I thought they had already begun," said Ndemi, with no trace of sarcasm.

I shook my head. "What has been happening is part of the natural order of things, and hence it is part of Kirinyaga. But when Koinnage does not kill the hyenas, he will want to bring a hunter to Kirinyaga, and that is *not* part of the natural order."

"You know he will do this?" asked Ndemi, impressed.

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"I know Koinnage," I answered.

"Then you will tell him not to."

"I will tell him not to."

"And he will listen to you."

"No," I said. "I do not think he will listen to me."

"But you are the *mundumugu*."

"But there are many men in the village who resent me," I explained. "They see the sleek ships that land on Kirinyaga from time to time, and they hear stories about the wonders of Nairobi and Mombasa, and they forget why we have come here. They become unhappy with the digging-stick, and they long for the Maasai's spear or the Kamba's bow or the European's machines."

Ndemi squatted in silence for a moment.

"I have a question, Koriba," he said at last.

"You may ask it."

"You are the *mundumugu*," he said. "You can change men into insects, and see in the darkness, and walk upon the air."

"That is true," I agreed.

"Then why do you not turn all the hyenas into honeybees and set fire to their hive?"

"Because *fisi* is not evil," I said. "It is his nature to eat flesh. Without him, the beasts of the field would become so plentiful that they would soon overrun our fields."

"Then why not kill just those *fisi* who kill us?"

"Do you not remember your own grandmother?" I asked. "Do you not recall the agony she suffered in her final days?"

"Yes."

"We do not kill our own kind. Were it not for *fisi*, she would have suffered for many more days. *Fisi* is only doing what Ngai created him to do."

"Ngai also created hunters," said Ndemi, casting me a sly look out of the corner of his eye.

"That is true."

"Then why do you not want hunters to come and kill *fisi*?"

"I will tell you the story of the Goat and the Lion, and then you will understand," I said.

"What do goats and lions have to do with hyenas?" he asked.

"Listen, and you will know," I answered. "Once there was a herd of black goats, and they lived a very happy life, for Ngai had provided them with green grass and lush plants and a nearby stream where they could drink, and when it rained they stood beneath the branches of large, stately trees where the raindrops could not reach them. Then one day a leopard came to their village, and because he was old and thin and

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weak, and could no longer hunt the impala and the waterbuck, he killed a goat and ate it.

" 'This is terrible!' said the goats. 'Something must be done.'

" 'He is an old leopard,' said the wisest of the goats. 'If he regains his strength from the flesh he has eaten, he will go back to hunting for the impala, for the impala's flesh is much more nourishing than ours, and if he does not regain his strength, he will soon be dead. All we need do is be especially alert while he walks among us.'

"But the other goats were too frightened to listen to his counsel, and they decided that they needed help.

" 'I would beware of anyone who is not a goat and offers to help you,' said the wisest goat, but they would not hear him, and finally they sought out a huge black-maned lion.

" 'There is a leopard that is eating our people,' they said, 'and we are not strong enough to drive him away. Will you help us?'

" 'I am always glad to help my friends,' answered the lion.

" 'We are a poor race,' said the goats. 'What tribute will you exact from us for your help?'

" 'None,' the lion assured them. 'I will do this solely because I am your friend.'

"And true to his word, the lion entered the village and waited until next the leopard came to feed, and then the lion pounced upon him and killed him.

" 'Oh, thank you, great savior!' cried the goats, doing a dance of joy and triumph around the lion.

" 'It was my pleasure,' said the lion. " 'For the leopard is my enemy as much as he is yours.'

" 'We shall sing songs and tell stories about you long after you leave,' continued the goats happily.

" 'Leave?' replied the lion, his eyes seeking out the fattest of the goats. 'Who is leaving?' "

Ndemi considered what I had said for a long moment, then looked up at me.

"You are not saying that the hunter will eat us as *fisi* does?"

"No, I am not."

He considered the implications further.

"Ah!" he said, smiling at last. "You are saying that if we cannot kill *fisi,* who will soon die or leave us, then we should not invite someone even stronger than *fisi,* someone who will not die or leave."

"That is correct."

"But why should a hunter of animals be a threat to Kirinyaga?" he continued thoughtfully.

"We are like the goats," I explained. "We live off the land, and we have

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not the power to kill our enemies. But a hunter is like the lion: It is his nature to kill, and he will be the only man on Kirinyaga who is skilled at killing."

"You think he will kill us, then?" asked Ndemi.

I shrugged. "Not at first. The lion had to kill the leopard before he could prey upon the goats. The hunter will kill *fisi* before he casts about for some other way to exercise his power."

"But you are our *mundumugu*!" protested Ndemi. "You will not let this happen!"

"I will try to prevent it," I said.

"If you try, you will succeed, and we will not send for a hunter."

"Perhaps."

"Are you not all-powerful?" asked Ndemi.

"I am all-powerful."

"Then why do you speak with such doubt?"

"Because I am not a hunter," I said. "The Kikuyu fear me because of my powers, but I have never knowingly harmed one of my people. I will not harm them now. I want what is best for Kirinyaga, but if their fear of *fisi* is greater than their fear of me, then I will lose."

Ndemi stared at the little patterns he had traced in the dirt with his finger.

"Perhaps, if a hunter does come, he will be a good man," he said at last.

"Perhaps," I agreed. "But he will still be a hunter." I paused. "The lion may sleep with the zebra in times of plenty. But in times of need, when both are starving, it is the lion who starves last."

Ten hunters had left the village, but only eight returned. Two had been attacked and killed by a pack of hyenas while they sat resting beneath the shade of an acacia tree. All day long the women wailed the death chant, while the sky turned black with smoke, for it is our custom to burn the huts of our dead.

That very same night Koinnage called a meeting of the Council of Elders. I waited until the last rays of the sun had vanished, then painted my face and wrapped myself in my ceremonial leopardskin cloak, and made my way to his *boma*.

There was total silence as I approached the old men of the village. Even the night birds seemed to have taken flight, and I walked among them, looking neither right nor left, finally taking my accustomed place on a stool just to the left of Koinnage's personal hut. I could see his three wives clustered together inside his senior wife's hut, kneeling as close to the entrance as they dared while straining to see and hear what transpired.

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The flickering firelight highlighted the faces of the elders, most of them grim and filled with fear. By precedent no one—not even the *mundumugu*—could speak until the paramount chief had spoken, and since Koinnage had still not emerged from his hut, I amused myself by withdrawing the bones from the leather pouch about my neck and casting them on the dirt. Three times I cast them, and three times I frowned at what I saw. Finally I put them back in my pouch, leaving those elders who were planning to disobey their *mundumugu* to wonder what I had seen.

At last Koinnage stepped forth from his hut, a long thin stick in his hand. It was his custom to wave the stick when he spoke to the Council, much as a conductor waves his baton.

"The hunt has failed," he announced dramatically, as if everyone in the village did not already know it. "Two more men have died because of *fisi*." He paused for dramatic effect, then shouted: "It must not happen again!"

"Do not go hunting again and it will not happen again," I said, for once he began to speak I was permitted to comment.

"You are the *mundumugu*," said one of the elders. "You should have protected them!"

"I told them not to go," I replied. "I cannot protect those who reject my counsel."

"*Fisi* must die!" screamed Koinnage, and as he turned to face me I detected a strong odor of *pombe* on his breath, and now I knew why he had remained in his hut for so long. He had been drinking *pombe* until his courage was up to the task at hand, that of opposing his *mundumugu*. "Never again will *fisi* dine upon the flesh of the Kikuyu, nor will we hide in our *bomas* like old women until Koriba tells us that it is safe to come out! *Fisi* must die!"

The elders took up the chant of "*Fisi* must die!" and Koinnage went through a pantomime of killing a hyena, using his stick as a spear.

"Men have reached the stars!" cried Koinnage. "They have built great cities beneath the sea. They have killed the last elephant and the last lion. Are we not men, too—or are we old women, to be terrified by unclean eaters of carrion?"

I got to my feet.

"What other men have achieved makes no difference to the Kikuyu," I said. "Other men did not cause our problem with *fisi*; other men cannot cure it."

"One of them can," said Koinnage, looking at the anxious faces which were distorted by the firelight. "A hunter."

The elders muttered their approval.

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"We must send for a hunter," repeated Koinnage, waving his stick wildly.

"It must not be a European," said an elder.

"Nor can it be a Wakamba," said another.

"Nor a Luo," said a third.

"The Nandi are the enemies of our blood," added a fourth.

"It will be whoever can kill *fisi*," said Koinnage.

"How will you find such a man?" asked an elder.

"Hyenas still live on Earth," answered Koinnage. "We will find a hunter or a control officer from one of the game parks, someone who has hunted and killed *fisi* many times."

"You are making a mistake," I said firmly, and suddenly there was absolute silence again.

"We must have a hunter," said Koinnage adamantly, when he saw that no one else would speak.

"You would only be bringing a greater killer to Kirinyaga to slay a lesser killer," I responded.

"I am the paramount chief," said Koinnage, and I could tell from the way he refused to meet my gaze that the effects of the *pombe* had left him now that he was forced to confront me before the elders. "What kind of chief would I be if I permitted *fisi* to continue to kill my people?"

"You can build traps for *fisi* until Ngai gives him back his taste for grasseaters," I said.

"How many more of us will *fisi* kill before the traps have been set?" demanded Koinnage, trying to work himself up into a rage again. "How many of us must die before the *mundumugu* admits that he is wrong, and that this is not Ngai's plan?"

"Stop!" I shouted, raising my hands above my head, and even Koinnage froze in his tracks, afraid to speak or to move. "I am your *mundumugu*. I am the book of our collected wisdom; each sentence I speak is a page. I have brought the rains on time, and I have blessed the harvest. Never have I misled you. Now I tell you that you must not bring a hunter to Kirinyaga."

And then Koinnage, who was literally shaking from his fear of me, forced himself to stare into my eyes.

"I am the paramount chief," he said, trying to steady his voice, "and I say we must act before *fisi* hungers again. *Fisi* must die! I have spoken."

The elders began chanting "*Fisi* must die!" again, and Koinnage's courage returned to him as he realized that he was not the only one to openly disobey his *mundumugu's* dictates. He led the frenzied chanting, walking from one elder to the next and finally to me, yelling "*Fisi* must die!" and punctuating it with wild gesticulations of his stick.

I realized that I had lost for the very first time in council, yet I made

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no threats, since it was important that any punishment for disobeying the dictates of their *mundumugu* must come from Ngai and not from me. I left in silence, walking through the circle of elders without looking at any of them, and returned to my *boma*.

The next morning two of Koinnage's cattle were found dead without a mark upon them, and each morning thereafter a different elder awoke to two dead cattle. I told the villagers that this was undoubtedly the hand of Ngai, and that the corpses must be burned, and that anyone who ate of them would die under a horrible *thahu*, or curse, and they followed my orders without question.

Then it was simply a matter of waiting for Koinnage's hunter to arrive.

He walked across the plain toward my *boma*, and it might have been Ngai Himself approaching me. He was tall, well over six and one-half feet, and slender, graceful as the gazelle and blacker than the darkest night. He was dressed in neither a *kikoi* nor in khakis, but in a lightweight pair of pants and a short-sleeved shirt. His feet were in sandals, and I could tell from the depth of his calluses and the straightness of his toes that he had spent most of his life without shoes. A small bag was slung over one shoulder, and in his left hand he carried a long rifle in a monogrammed gun case.

When he reached the spot where I was sitting he stopped, totally at ease, and stared unblinking at me. From the arrogance of his expression, I knew that he was a Maasai.

"Where is the village of Koriba?" he asked in Swahili.

I pointed to my left. "In the valley," I said.

"Why do you live alone, old man?"

Those were his exact words. Not *mzee*, which is a term of respect for the elderly, a term that acknowledges the decades of accumulated wisdom, but *old man*.

Yes, I concluded silently, *there is no doubt that you are a Maasai.*

"The *mundumugu* always lives apart from other men," I answered aloud.

"So you are the witch doctor," he said. "I would have thought your people had outgrown such things."

"As yours have outgrown the need for manners?" I responded.

He chuckled in amusement. "You are not glad to see me, are you, old man?"

"No, I am not."

"Well, if your magic had been strong enough to kill the hyenas, I would not be here. *I* am not to blame for that."

"You are not to blame for anything," I said. "Yet."

"What is your name, old man?"

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"Koriba."

He placed a thumb to his chest. "I am William."

"That is not a Maasai name," I noted.

"My full name is William Sambeke."

"Then I will call you Sambeke."

He shrugged. "Call me whatever you want." He shaded his eyes from the sun and looked off toward the village. "This isn't exactly what I expected."

"What did you expect, Sambeke?" I asked.

"I thought you people were trying to create a Utopia here."

"We are."

He snorted contemptuously. "You live in huts, you have no machinery, and you even have to hire someone from Earth to kill hyenas for you. That's not *my* idea of Utopia."

"Then you will doubtless wish to return to your home," I suggested.

"I have a job to do here first," he replied. "A job *you* failed to do."

I made no answer, and he stared at me for a long moment.

"Well?" he said at last.

"Well what?"

"Aren't you going to spout some mumbo-jumbo and make me disappear in a cloud of smoke, *mundumugu?*"

"Before you choose to become my enemy," I said in perfect English, "you should know that I am not as ineffectual as you may think, nor am I impressed by Maasai arrogance."

He stared at me in surprise, then threw back his head and laughed.

"There's more to you than meets the eye, old man!" he said in English. "I think we are going to become great friends!"

"I doubt it," I replied in Swahili.

"What schools did you attend back on Earth?" he asked, matching my change in languages again.

"Cambridge and Yale," I said. "But that was many years ago."

"Why does an educated man choose to sit in the dirt beside a grass hut?"

"Why does a Maasai accept a commission from a Kikuyu?" I responded.

"I like to hunt," he said. "And I wanted to see this Utopia you have built."

"And now you have seen it."

"I have seen Kirinyaga," he replied. "I have not yet seen Utopia."

"That is because you do not know how to look for it."

"You are a clever old man, Koriba, full of clever answers," said Sambeke, taking no offense. "Why have you not made yourself king of this entire planetoid?"

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"The *mundumugu* is the repository of our traditions. That is all the power he seeks or needs."

"You could at least have had them build you a house, instead of living like this. No Maasai lives in a *manyatta* any longer."

"And after the house would come a car?" I asked.

"Once you built some roads," he agreed.

"And then a factory to build more cars, and another one to build more houses, and then an impressive building for our Parliament, and perhaps a railroad line?" I shook my head. "That is a description of Kenya, not of Utopia."

"You are making a mistake," said Sambeke. "On my way here from the landing field—what is it called?"

"Haven."

"On my way here from Haven, I saw buffalo and kudu and impala. A hunting lodge by the river overlooking the plains would bring in a lot of tourist money."

"We do not hunt our grasseaters."

"You wouldn't have to," he said meaningfully. "And think of how much their money could help your people."

"May Ngai preserve us from people who want to help us," I said devoutly.

"You are a stubborn old man," he said. "I think I had better go talk to Koinnage. Which *shamba* is his?"

"The largest," I answered. "He is the paramount chief."

He nodded. "Of course. I will see you later, old man."

I nodded. "Yes, you will."

"And after I have killed your hyenas, perhaps we will share a gourd of *pombe* and discuss ways to turn this world into a Utopia. I have been very disappointed thus far."

So saying, he turned toward the village and began walking down the long, winding trail to Koinnage's *boma*.

He turned Koinnage's head, as I knew he would. By the time I had eaten and made my way to the village, the two of them were sitting beside a fire in front of the paramount chief's *boma*, and Sambeke was describing the hunting lodge he wanted to build by the river.

"*Jambo*, Koriba," said Koinnage, looking up at me as I approached them.

"*Jambo*, Koinnage," I responded, squatting down next to him.

"You have met William Sambeke?"

"I have met Sambeke," I said, and the Maasai grinned at my refusal to use his European name.

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"He has many plans for Kirinyaga," continued Koinnage, as some of the villagers began wandering over.

"How interesting," I replied. "You asked for a hunter, and they have sent you a planner instead."

"Some of us," interjected Sambeke, an amused expression on his face, "have more than one talent."

"Some of us," I said, "have been here for half a day and have not yet begun to hunt."

"I will kill the hyenas tomorrow," said Sambeke, "when their bellies are full and they are too content to race away at my approach."

"How will you kill them?" I asked.

He carefully unlocked his gun case and pulled out his rifle, which was equipped with a telescopic sight. Most of the villagers had never seen such a weapon, and they crowded around it, whispering to each other.

"Would you care to examine it?" he asked me.

I shook my head. "The weapons of the Europeans hold no interest for me."

"This rifle was manufactured in Zimbabwe, by members of the Shona tribe," he corrected me.

I shrugged. "Then they are black Europeans."

"Whatever they are, they make a splendid weapon," said Sambeke.

"For those who are afraid to hunt in the traditional way," I said.

"Do not taunt me, old man," said Sambeke, and suddenly a hush fell over the onlookers, for no man speaks thus to the *mundumugu*.

"I do not taunt you, Maasai," I said. "I merely point out why you have brought the weapon. It is no crime to be afraid of *fisi*."

"I fear nothing," he said heatedly.

"That is not true," I said. "Like all of us, you fear failure."

"I shall not fail with *this*," he said, patting the rifle.

"By the way," I asked, "was it not the Maasai who once proved their manhood by facing the lion armed only with a spear?"

"It was," he answered. "And it was the Maasai *and* the Kikuyu who lost most of their babies at birth, and who succumbed to every disease that passed through their villages, and who lived in shelters that could protect them from neither the rain nor the cold nor even the flesh-eaters of the veldt. It was the Maasai and the Kikuyu who learned from the Europeans, and who took back their land from the white men, and who built great cities where once there was only dust and swamps. Or, rather," he added, "it was the Maasai and *most* of the Kikuyu."

"I remember seeing a circus when I was in England," I said, raising my voice so that all could hear me, though I directed my remarks at Sambeke. "In it there was a chimpanzee. He was a very bright animal. They dressed him in human clothing, and he rode a human bicycle, and

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he played human music on a human flute—but that did not make him a human. In fact, he amused the humans because he was such a grotesque mockery of them . . . just as the Maasai and Kikuyu who wear suits and drive cars and work in large buildings are not Europeans, but are instead a mockery of them."

"That is just your opinion, old man," said the Maasai, "and it is wrong."

"Is it?" I asked. "The chimpanzee had been tainted by his association with humans, so that he could never survive in the wild. And *you,* I notice, must have the Europeans' weapon to hunt an animal that your grandfathers would have gone out and slain with a knife or a spear."

"Are you challenging me, old man?" asked Sambeke, once again amused.

"I am merely pointing out why you have brought your rifle with you," I answered.

"No," he said. "You are trying to regain the power you lost when your people sent for me. But you have made a mistake."

"In what way?"

"You have made me your enemy."

"Will you shoot me with your rifle, then?" I asked calmly, for I knew he would not.

He leaned over and whispered to me, so that only I could hear him.

"We could have made a fortune together, old man. I would have been happy to share it with you, in exchange for you keeping your people in line, for a safari company will need many workers. But now you have publicly opposed me, and I cannot permit that."

"We must learn to live with disappointments," I said.

"I am glad you feel that way," he said. "For I plan to turn this world into a Utopia, rather than some Kikuyu dreamland."

Then, suddenly, he stood up.

"Boy," he said to Ndemi, who was standing at the outskirts of the crowd. "Bring me a spear."

Ndemi looked to me, and I nodded, for I could not believe that the Maasai would kill me with *any* weapon.

Ndemi brought the spear to Sambeke, who took it from him and leaned it against Koinnage's hut. Then he stood before the fire and slowly began removing all his clothes. When he was naked, with the firelight playing off his lean, hard body, looking like an African god, he picked up the spear and held it over his head.

"I go to hunt *fisi* in the dark, in the old way," he announced to the assembled villagers. "Your *mundumugu* has laid down the challenge, and if you are to listen to my counsel in the future, as I hope you will, you must know that I can meet any challenge he sets for me."

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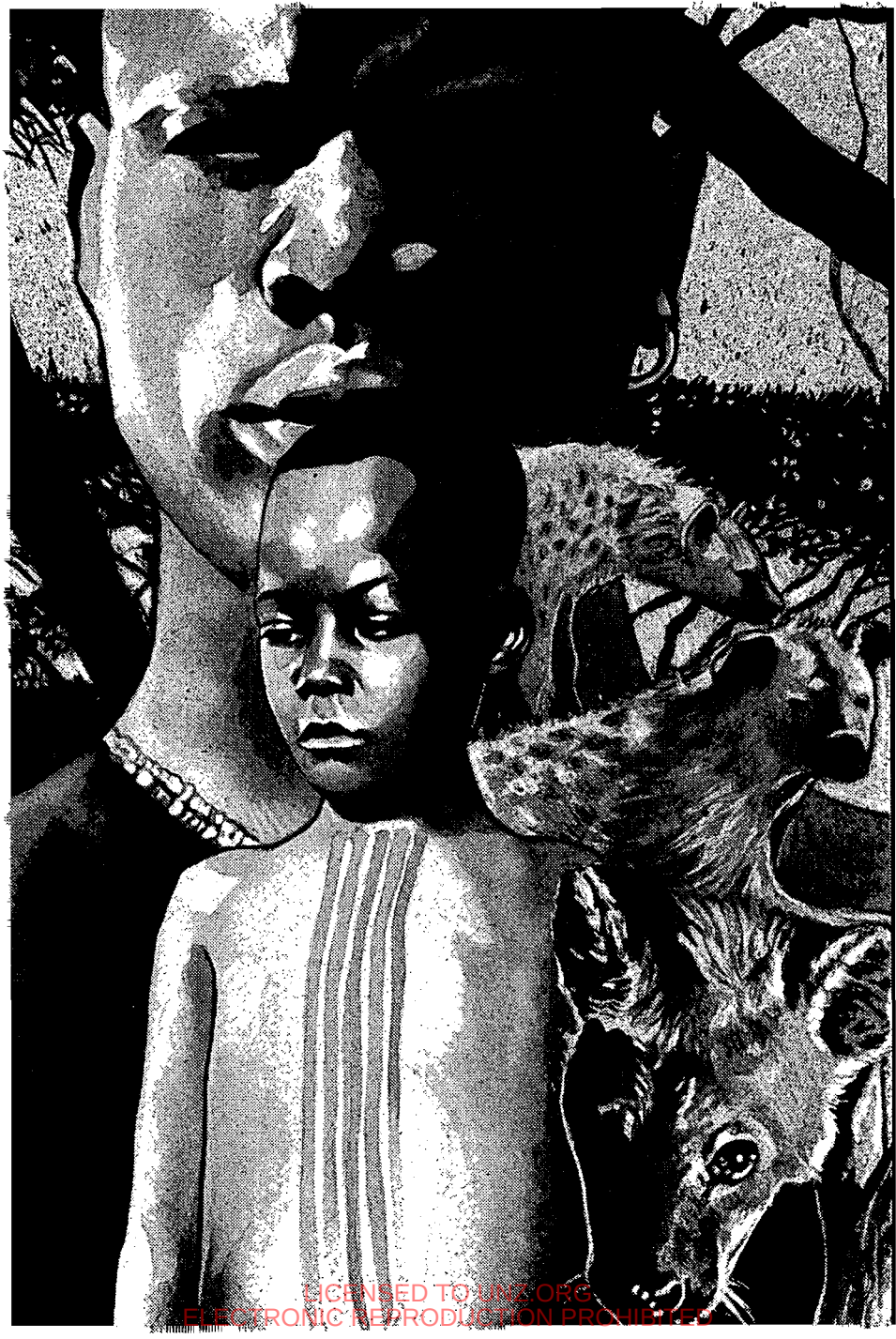

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And before anyone could say a word or move to stop him, he strode boldly off into the night.

"Now he will die, and Maintenance will want to revoke our charter!" complained Koinnage.

"If he dies, it was his own decision, and Maintenance will not punish us in any way," I replied. I stared long and hard at him. "I wonder that you care."

"That I care if he should die?"

"That you care if Maintenance should revoke our charter," I answered. "If you listen to the Maasai, you will turn Kirinyaga into another Kenya, so why should you mind returning to the original Kenya?"

"He does not want to turn Kirinyaga into Kenya, but into Utopia," said Koinnage sullenly.

"We are already attempting to do that," I noted. "Does *his* Utopia include a big European house for the paramount chief?"

"We did not discuss it thoroughly," said Koinnage uneasily.

"And perhaps some extra cattle, in exchange for supplying him with porters and gunbearers?"

"He has good ideas," said Koinnage, ignoring my question. "Why should we carry our water from the river when he can create pumps and pipes to carry it for us?"

"Because if water is easy to obtain, it will become easy to waste, and we have no more water to waste here than we had in Kenya, where all the lakes have dried up because of far-seeing men like Sambeke."

"You have answers for everything," said Koinnage bitterly.

"No," I said. "But I have answers for this Maasai, for his questions have been asked many times before, and always in the past the Kikuyu have given the wrong answer."

Suddenly we heard a hideous scream from perhaps half a mile away.

"It is finished," said Koinnage grimly. "The Maasai is dead, and now we must answer to Maintenance."

"It did not sound like a man," said Ndemi.

"You are just a *mtoto*—a child," said Koinnage. "What do you know?"

"I know what Juma sounded like when *fisi* killed him," said Ndemi defiantly. "That is what I know."

We waited in silence to see if there would be another sound, but none was forthcoming.

"Perhaps it is just as well that *fisi* has killed the Maasai," said old Njobe at last. "I saw the building that he drew in the dirt, the one he would make for visitors, and it was an evil building. It was not round and safe from demons like our own huts, but instead it had corners, and everyone knows that demons live in corners."

"Truly, there would be a curse upon it," agreed another of the elders.

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"What can one expect from one who hunts *fisi* at night?" added another.

"One can expect a dead *fisi!*" said Sambeke triumphantly, as he stepped out of the shadows and threw the bloody corpse of a large male hyena onto the ground. Everyone backed away from him in awe, and he turned to me, the firelight flickering off his sleek black body. "What do you say now, old man?"

"I say that you are a greater killer than *fisi,*" I answered.

He smiled with satisfaction.

"Now," he said, "let us see what we can learn from this particular *fisi.*" He turned to a young man. "Boy, bring a knife."

"His name is Kamabi," I said.

"I have not had time to learn names," replied Sambeke. He turned back to Kamabi. "Do as I ask, boy."

"He is a man," I said.

"It is difficult to tell in the dark," said Sambeke with a shrug.

Kamabi returned a moment later with an ancient hunting knife; it was so old and so rusty that Sambeke did not care to touch it, and so he merely pointed to the hyena.

"*Kata hi ya tumbo,*" he said. "Slit the stomach here."

Kamabi knelt down and slit open the hyena's belly. The smell was terrible, but the Maasai picked up a stick and began prodding through the contents. Finally he stood up.

"I had hoped that we would find a bracelet or an earring," he said. "But it has been a long time since the boy was killed, and such things would have passed through *fisi* days ago."

"Koriba can roll the bones and tell if this is the one who killed Juma," said Koinnage.

Sambeke snorted contemptuously. "Koriba can roll the bones from now until the long rains come, but they will tell him nothing." He looked at the assembled villagers. "I have killed *fisi* in the old way to prove that I am no coward or European, to hunt only in the daylight and hide behind my gun. But now that I have shown you that I can do it, tomorrow I shall show you how many *fisi* I can kill in *my* way, and then you may decide which way is better, Koriba's or mine." He paused. "Now I need a hut to sleep in, so that I may be strong and alert when the sun rises."

Every villager except Koinnage immediately volunteered his hut. The Maasai looked at each man in turn, and then turned to the paramount chief. "I will take yours," he said.

"But—" began Koinnage.

"And one of your wives to keep me warm in the night." He stared directly into Koinnage's eyes. "Or would you deny me your hospitality after I have killed *fisi* for you?"

"No," said Koinnage at last. "I will not deny you."

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The Maasai shot me a triumphant smile. "It is still not Utopia," he said. "But it is getting closer."

The next morning Sambeke went out with his rifle.

I walked down to the village in the morning to give Zindu ointment to help dry up her milk, for her baby had been stillborn. When I was finished, I went through the *shambas,* blessing the scarecrows, and before long I had my usual large group of children beside me, begging me to tell them a story.

Finally, when the sun was high in the sky and it was too hot to keep walking, I sat down beneath the shade of an acacia tree.

"All right," I said. "Now you may have your story."

"What story will you tell us today, Koriba?" asked one of the girls.

"I think I shall tell you the tale of the Unwise Elephant," I said.

"Why was he unwise?" asked a boy.

"Listen, and you shall know," I said, and they all fell silent.

"Once there was a young elephant," I began, "and because he was young, he had not yet acquired the wisdom of his race. And one day this elephant chanced upon a city in the middle of the savannah, and he entered it, and beheld its wonders, and thought it was quite the most marvelous thing he had ever seen. All his life he had labored day and night to fill his belly, and here, in the city, were wonderful machines that could make his life so much easier that he was determined to own some of them.

"But when he approached the owner of a digging stick, with which he could find buried acacia pods, the owner said, 'I am a poor man, and I cannot give my digging stick to you. But because you want it so badly, I will make a trade.'

" 'But I have nothing to trade,' said the elephant unhappily.

" 'Of course you do,' said the man. 'If you will let me have your ivory, so that I can carve designs on it, you may have the digging stick.'

"The elephant considered this offer, and finally agreed, for if he had a digging stick he would no longer need his tusks to root up the ground.

"And he walked a little farther, and he came to an old woman with a weaving loom, and he thought this was a wonderful thing, for with it he would be able to make a blanket for himself so that he could stay warm during the long nights.

"He asked the woman for her weaving loom, and she replied that she would not give it away, but that she would be happy to trade it.

" 'All I have to trade is my digging stick,' said the elephant.

" 'But I do not need a digging stick,' said the old woman. 'You must let me cut off one of your feet, that I may make a stool of it."

"The elephant thought for a long time, and he remembered how cold

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he had been the previous night, and finally he agreed, and the trade was made.

"Then he came to a man who had a net, and the elephant thought that the net would be a wonderful thing to have, for now he could catch the fruits when he shook a tree, rather than having to hunt for them on the ground.

" 'I will not give you the net, for it took me many days to make it,' said the man, 'but I will trade it to you for your ears, which will make excellent sleeping mats.'

"Again the elephant agreed, and finally he went back to the herd to show them the wonders he had brought from the city of men.

" 'What need have we for digging sticks?' asked his brother. 'No digging stick will last as long as our tusks.'

" 'It might be nice to have a blanket,' said his mother, 'but to make a blanket with a weaving loom we would need fingers, which we do not have.'

" 'I cannot see the purpose of a net for catching fruit from the trees,' said his father. 'For if you hold the net in your trunk, how will you shake the fruits loose from the tree, and if you shake the tree, how will you hold the net?'

" 'I see now that the tools of men are of no use to elephants,' said the young elephant. 'I can never be a man, so I will go back to being an elephant.'

"His father shook his head sadly. 'It is true that you are not a man—but because you have dealt with men, you are no longer an elephant either. You have lost your foot, and cannot keep up with the herd. You have given away your ivory, and you cannot dig for water, or churn up the ground to look for acacia pods. You have parted with your ears, and now you cannot flap them to cool your blood when the sun is high in the sky.'

"And so the elephant spent the rest of his unhappy life halfway between the city and the herd, for he could not become part of one and he was no longer part of the other."

I stopped, and stared off into the distance, where a small herd of impala was grazing just beyond one of our cultivated fields.

"Is that all?" asked the girl who had first requested the story.

"That is all," I said.

"It was not a very good story," she continued.

"Oh?" I asked, slapping a small insect that was crawling up my arm. "Why not?"

"Because the ending was not happy."

"Not all stories have happy endings," I said.

"I do not like unhappy endings," she said.

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"Neither do I," I agreed. I paused and looked at her. "How do *you* think the story should end?"

"The elephant should not trade the things that make him an elephant, since he can never become a man."

"Very good," I said. "Would you trade the things that make you a Kikuyu, to try to be something you can never become?"

"Never!"

"Would any of you?" I asked my entire audience.

"No!" they cried.

"What if the elephant offered you his tusks, or the hyena offered you his fangs?"

"Never!"

I paused for just a moment before asking my next question.

"What if the Maasai offered you his gun?"

Most of the children yelled "No!", but I noticed that two of the older boys did not answer. I questioned them about it.

"A gun is not like tusks or teeth," said the taller of the two boys. "It is a weapon that men use."

"That is right," said the smaller boy, shuffling his bare feet in the dirt and raising a small cloud of dust. "The Maasai is not an animal. He is like us."

"He is not an animal," I agreed, "but he is not like us. Do the Kikuyu use guns, or live in brick houses, or wear European clothes?"

"No," said the boys in unison.

"Then if you were to use a gun, or live in a brick house, or wear European clothes, would you be a true Kikuyu?"

"No," they admitted.

"But would using a gun, or living in a brick house, or wearing European clothes, make you a Maasai or a European?"

"No."

"Do you see, then, why we must reject the tools and the gifts of outsiders? We can never become like them, but we can stop being Kikuyu, and if we stop being Kikuyu without becoming something else, then we are nothing."

"I understand, Koriba," said the taller boy.

"Are you sure?" I asked.

He nodded. "I am sure."

"Why are all your stories like this?" asked a girl.

"Like what?"

"They all have titles like the Unwise Elephant, or the Jackal and the Honeybird, or the Leopard and the Shrike, but when you explain them they are always about the Kikuyu."

"That is because I am a Kikuyu and you are a Kikuyu," I replied with

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a smile. "If we were leopards, then all my stories would really be about leopards."

I spent a few more minutes with them beneath the shade of the tree, and then I saw Ndemi approaching through the tall grass, his face alive with excitement.

"Well?" I said when he had joined us.

"The Maasai has returned," he announced.

"Did he kill any *fisi?*" I asked.

"*Mingi sana,*" replied Ndemi. "Very many."

"Where is he now?"

"By the river, with some of the young men who served as his gunbearers and skinners."

"I think I shall go visit them," I said, getting carefully to my feet, for my legs tend to get stiff when I sit in one position for too long. "Ndemi, you will come with me. The rest of you children are to go back to your *shambas,* and to think about the story of the Unwise Elephant."

Ndemi's chest puffed up like one of my roosters when I singled him out to accompany me, and a moment later we were walking across the sprawling savannah.

"What is the Maasai doing at the river?" I asked.

"He has cut down some young saplings with a *panga,*" answered Ndemi, "and he is instructing some of the men to build something, but I do not know what it is."

I peered through the haze of heat and dust, and saw a small party of men approaching us.

"*I* know what it is," I said softly, for although I had never seen a sedan chair, I knew what one looked like, and it was currently approaching us as four Kikuyu bore the weight of the chair—and the Maasai—upon their sweating shoulders.

Since they were heading in our direction, I told Ndemi to stop walking, and we stood and waited for them.

"*Jambo,* old man!" said the Maasai when we were within earshot. "I have killed seven more hyenas this morning."

"*Jambo,* Sambeke," I replied. "You look very comfortable."

"It could use cushions," he said. "And the bearers do not carry it levelly. But I will make do with it."

"Poor man," I said, "who lacks cushions and thoughtful bearers. How did these oversights come to pass?"

"That is because it is not Utopia yet," he replied with a smile. "But it is getting very close."

"You will be sure to tell me when it arrives," I said.

"You will know, old man."

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Then he directed his bearers to carry him to the village. Ndemi and I remained where we were, and watched him disappear in the distance.

That night there was a feast in the village to celebrate the slaying of the eight hyenas. Koinnage himself had slaughtered an ox, and there was much *pombe,* and the people were singing and dancing when I arrived, re-enacting the stalking and killing of the animals by their new savior.

The Maasai himself was seated on a tall chair, taller even than Koinnage's throne. In one hand he held a gourd of *pombe,* and the leather case that held his rifle was laid carefully across his lap. He was clad now in the red robe of his people, his hair was neatly braided in his tribal fashion, and his lean body glistened with oils that had been rubbed onto it. Two young girls, scarcely past circumcision age, stood behind him, hanging upon his every word.

"*Jambo,* old man!" he greeted me as I approached him.

"*Jambo,* Sambeke," I said.

"That is no longer my name," he said.

"Oh? And have you taken a Kikuyu name instead?"

"I have taken a name that the Kikuyu will understand," he replied. "It is what the village will call me from this day forth."

"You are not leaving, now that the hunt is over?"

He shook his head. "I am not leaving."

"You are making a mistake," I said.

"Not as big a mistake as you made when you chose not to be my ally," he responded. Then, after a brief pause, he smiled and added: "Do you not wish to know my new name?"

"I suppose I should know it, if you are to remain here for any length of time," I agreed.

He leaned over and whispered the word to me that Ngai had whispered to Gikuyu on the holy mountain millions of years earlier.

"Bwana?" I repeated.

He looked smugly at me, and smiled again.

"*Now,*" he said, "it is Utopia."

Bwana spent the next few weeks making Kirinyaga a Utopia—for Bwana.

He took three young wives for himself, and he had the villagers build him a large house by the river, a house with windows and corners and verandas such as the colonial Europeans might have built in Kenya two centuries earlier.

He went hunting every day, collecting trophies for himself and providing the village with more meat than they had ever had before. At

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nights he went to the village to eat and drink and dance, and then, armed with his rifle, he walked through the darkness to his own house.

Soon Koinnage was making plans to build a house similar to Bwana's, right in the village, and many of the young men wanted the Maasai to procure rifles for them. This he refused to do, explaining that there could be only one Bwana on Kirinyaga, and it was their job to serve as trackers and cooks and skinners.

He no longer wore European clothes, but always appeared in traditional Maasai dress, his hair meticulously pleated and braided, his body bright and glistening from the oils that his wives rubbed on him each night.

I kept my own counsel and continued my duties, caring for the sick, bringing the rains, reading the entrails of goats, blessing the scarecrows, alleviating curses. But I did not say another word to Bwana, nor did he speak to me.

Ndemi spent more and more time with me, tending my goats and chickens, and even keeping my *boma* clean, which is woman's work but which he volunteered to do.

Finally one day he approached me while I sat in the shade, watching the cattle grazing in a nearby field.

"May I speak, *mundumugu?*" he asked, squatting down next to me.

"You may speak, Ndemi," I answered.

"The Maasai has taken another wife," he said. "And he killed Karanja's dog because its barking annoyed him." He paused. "And he calls everyone 'Boy,' even the elders, which seems to me to be a term of disrespect."

"I know these things," I said.

"Why do you not do something, then?" asked Ndemi. "Are you not all-powerful?"

"Only Ngai is all-powerful," I said. "I am just the *mundumugu*."

"But is not the *mundumugu* more powerful than a Maasai?"

"Most of the people in the village do not seem to think so," I said.

"Ah!" he said. "You are angry with them for losing faith in you, and *that* is why you have not turned him into an insect and stepped on him."

"I am not angry," I said. "Merely disappointed."

"When will you kill him?" asked Ndemi.

"It would do no good to kill him," I replied.

"Why not?"

"Because they believe in his power, and if he died, they would just send for another hunter, who would become another Bwana."

"Then will you do nothing?"

"I will do something," I answered. "But killing Bwana is not the answer. He must be humiliated before the people, so that they can see for

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themselves that he is not, after all, a *mundumugu* who must be listened to and obeyed."

"How will you do this?" asked Ndemi anxiously.

"I do not know yet," I said. "I must study him further."

"I thought you knew everything already."

I smiled. "The *mundumugu* does not know everything, nor does he have to."

"Oh?"

"He must merely know more than his people."

"But you already know more than Koinnage and the others."

"I must be sure I know more than the Maasai before I act," I said. "You may know how large the leopard is, and how strong, and how fast, and how cunning—but until you have studied him further, and learned how he charges, and which side he favors, and how he tests the wind, and how he signals an attack by moving his tail, you are at a disadvantage if you hunt him. I am an old man, and I cannot defeat the Maasai in hand-to-hand combat, so I must study him and discover his weakness."

"And what if he has none?"

"Everything has a weakness."

"Even though he is stronger than you?"

"The elephant is the strongest beast of all, and yet a handful of tiny ants inside his trunk can drive him mad with pain to the point where he will kill himself." I paused. "You do not have to be stronger than your opponent, for surely the ant is not stronger than the elephant. But the ant knows the elephant's weakness, and I must learn the Maasai's."

He placed his hand to his chest.

"*I* believe in you, Koriba," he said.

"I am glad," I said, shielding my eyes as a hot breeze blew a cloud of dust across my hill. "For you alone will not be disappointed when I finally confront the Maasai."

"Will you forgive the men of the village?" he asked.

I paused before answering. "When they remember once more why we came to Kirinyaga, I will forgive them," I said at last.

"And if they do not remember?"

"I must make them remember," I said. I looked out across the savannah, following its contours as it led up the river and the woods. "Ngai has given the Kikuyu a second chance at Utopia, and we must not squander it."

"You and Koinnage, and even the Maasai, keep using that word, but I do not understand it."

"Utopia?" I asked.

He nodded. "What does it mean?"

"It means many things to many people," I replied. "To the true Kikuyu,

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it means to live as one with the land, to respect the ancient laws and rituals, and to please Ngai."

"That seems simple enough."

"It does, doesn't it?" I agreed. "And yet you cannot begin to imagine how many millions of men have died because their definition of Utopia differed from their neighbor's."

He stared at me. "Truly?"

"Truly. Take the Maasai, for example. His Utopia is to ride upon his sedan chair, and to shoot animals, and to take many wives, and to live in a big house by the river."

"It does not sound like a bad thing," observed Ndemi thoughtfully.

"It is not a bad thing—for the Maasai." I paused briefly. "But do you suppose it is Utopia for the men who must carry the chair, or the animals that he kills, or the young men of the village who cannot marry, or the Kikuyu who must build his house by the river?"

"I see," said Ndemi, his eyes widening. "Kirinyaga must be a Utopia for all of us, or it cannot be a Utopia at all." He brushed an insect from his cheek and looked at me. "Is that correct, Koriba?"

"You learn quickly, Ndemi," I said, reaching a hand out and rubbing the hair atop his head. "Perhaps some day you yourself will become a *mundumugu*."

"Will I learn magic then?"

"You must learn many things to be a *mundumugu*," I said. "Magic is the least of them."

"But it is the most impressive," he said. "It is what makes the people fear you, and fearing you, they are willing to listen to your wisdom."

As I considered his words, I finally began to get an inkling of how I would defeat Bwana and return my people to the Utopian existence that we had envisioned when we accepted our charter for Kirinyaga.

"Sheep!" growled Bwana. "All sheep! No wonder the Maasai preyed on the Kikuyu in the old days."

I had decided to enter the village at night, to further observe my enemy. He had drunk much *pombe*, and finally stripped off his red cloak and stood naked before Koinnage's *boma*, challenging the young men of the village to wrestle him. They stood back in the shadows, shaking like women, in awe of his physical prowess.

"I will fight three of you at once!" he said, looking around for any volunteers. There were none, and he threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"And you wonder why I am Bwana and you are a bunch of boys!"

Suddenly his eyes fell on me.

"*There* is a man who is not afraid of me," he announced.

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"That is true," I said.

"Will *you* wrestle me, old man?"

I shook my head. "No, I will not."

"I guess you are just another coward."

"I do not fear the buffalo or the hyena, but I do not wrestle with *them,* either," I said. "There is a difference between courage and foolishness. You are a young man; I am an old one."

"What brings you to the village at night?" he asked. "Have you been speaking to your gods, plotting ways to kill me?"

"There is only one god," I replied, "and He disapproves of killing."

He nodded, an amused smile on his face. "Yes, it stands to reason that the god of sheep would disapprove of killing." Suddenly the smile vanished, and he stared contemptuously at me. "En-kai spits upon your god, old man."

"You call Him En-kai and we call Him Ngai," I said calmly, "but it is the same god, and the day will come when we all must answer to Him. I hope you will be as bold and fearless then as you are now."

"I hope your Ngai will not tremble before *me,*" he retorted, posturing before his wives, who giggled at his arrogance. "Did I not go naked into the night, armed with only a spear, and slay *fisi?* Have I not killed more than one hundred beasts in less than thirty days? Your Ngai had better not test my temper."

"He will test more than your temper," I replied.

"What does *that* mean?"

"It means whatever you wish it to mean," I said. "I am old and tired, and I wish to sit by the fire and drink *pombe.*"

With that I turned my back on him and walked over to Njobe, who was warming his ancient bones by a small fire just outside Koinnage's *boma.*

Unable to find an opponent with which to wrestle, Bwana drank more *pombe* and finally turned to his wives.

"No one will fight me," he said with mock misery. "And yet my fighting blood is boiling within my veins. Set me a task—any task—that I may do for your pleasure."

The three girls whispered together and giggled again, and finally one of them stepped forward, urged by the other two.

"We have seen Koriba place his hand in the fire without being burned," she said. "Can you do that?"

He snorted contemptuously. "A magician's trick, nothing more. Set me a true task."

"Set him an *easier* task," I said. "Obviously the fire is too painful."

He turned and glared at me. "What kind of lotion did you place on your hand before putting it in the fire, old man?" he asked in English.

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I smiled at him. "That would be an *illusionist's* trick, not a magician's," I answered.

"You think to humiliate me before my people?" he said. "Think again, old man."

He walked to the fire, stood between Njobe and myself, and thrust his hand into it. His face was totally impassive, but I could smell the burning flesh. Finally he withdrew it and held it up.

"There is no magic to it!" he shouted in Swahili.

"But you are burned, my husband," said the wife who had challenged him.

"Did I cry out?" he demanded. "Did I cringe from pain?"

"No, you did not."

"Can any other man place his hand in the fire without crying out?"

"No, my husband."

"Who, then, is the greater man—Koriba, who protects himself with magic, or I, who need no magic to place my hand in the fire?"

"Bwana," said his wives in unison.

He turned to me and grinned triumphantly.

"You have lost again, old man."

But I had not lost.

I had gone to the village to study my enemy, and I had learned much from my visit. Just as a Kikuyu cannot become a Maasai, this Maasai could not become a Kikuyu. There was an arrogance that had been bred into him, an arrogance so great that it had not only elevated him to his current high status, but would prove to be his downfall as well.

The next morning Koinnage himself came to my *boma.*

"*Jambo,*" I greeted him.

"*Jambo,* Koriba," he replied. "We must talk."

"About what?"

"About Bwana," said Koinnage.

"What about him?"

"He has overstepped himself," said Koinnage. "Last night, after you left, he decided that he had drunk too much *pombe* to return home, and he threw me out of my own hut—*me,* the paramount chief!" He paused to kick at a small lizard that had been approaching his foot, and then continued. "Not only that, but this morning he announced that he was taking my youngest wife, Kibo, for his own!"

"Interesting," I remarked, watching the tiny lizard as it scurried under a bush, then turned and stared at us.

"Is that all you can say?" he demanded. "I paid twenty cows and five goats for her. When I told him that, do you know what he did?"

"What?"

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Koinnage held up a small silver coin for me to see. "He gave me a *shilling* from Kenya!" He spat upon the coin and threw it onto the dry, rocky slope beyond my *boma*. "And now he says that whenever he stays in the village he will sleep in my hut, and that I must sleep elsewhere."

"I am very sorry," I said. "But I warned you against sending for a hunter. It is his nature to prey upon all things: the hyena, the kudu, even the Kikuyu." I paused, enjoying his discomfort. "Perhaps you should tell him to go away."

"He would not listen."

I nodded. "The lion may sleep with the goat, and he may feed upon him, but he very rarely listens to him."

"Koriba, we were wrong," said Koinnage, his face a mask of desperation. "Can you not rid of us this intruder?"

"Why?" I asked.

"I have already told you."

I shook my head slowly. "You have told me why *you* have cause to resent him," I answered. "That is not enough."

"What more must I say?" asked Koinnage.

I paused and looked at him. "It will come to you in the fullness of time."

"Perhaps we can contact Maintenance," suggested Koinnage. "Surely *they* have the power to make him leave."

I sighed deeply. "Have you learned nothing?"

"I do not understand."

"You sent for the Maasai because he was stronger than *fisi*. Now you want to send for Maintenance because they are stronger than the Maasai. If one man can so change our society, what do you think will happen when we invite many men? Already our young men talk of hunting instead of farming, and wish to build European houses with corners where demons can hide, and beg the Maasai to supply them with guns. What will they want when they have seen all the wonders that Maintenance possesses?"

"Then how are we to rid ourselves of the Maasai?"

"When the time comes, he will leave," I said.

"You are certain?"

"I am the *mundumugù*."

"When will this time be?" asked Koinnage.

"When you know *why* he must leave," I answered. "Now perhaps you should return to the village, lest you discover that he wants your other wives as well."

Panic spread across Koinnage's face, and he raced back down the winding trail to the village without another word.

* * *

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I spent the next few days gathering bark from some of the trees at the edge of the savannah, and when I had gathered as much as I needed I added certain herbs and roots and mashed them to a pulp in an old turtle shell. I added some water, placed it in a cooking gourd, and began simmering the concoction over a small fire.

When I was done I sent for Ndemi, who arrived about half an hour later.

"*Jambo,* Koriba," he said.

"*Jambo,* Ndemi," I replied.

He looked at my cooking gourd and wrinkled his nose. "What is that?" he asked. "It smells terrible."

"It is not for eating," I replied.

"I hope not," he said devoutly.

"Be careful not to touch it," I said, walking over to the tree that grew within my *boma* and sitting down in its shade. Ndemi, giving the gourd a wide berth, joined me.

"You sent for me," he said.

"Yes, I did."

"I am glad. The village is not a good place to be."

"Oh?"

He nodded. "A number of the young men now follow Bwana everywhere. They take goats from the *shambas* and cloth from the huts, and nobody dares to stop them. Kanjara tried yesterday, but the young men hit him and made his mouth bleed while Bwana watched and laughed."

I nodded, for none of this surprised me.

"I think it is almost time," I said, waving my hand to scare away some flies that also sought shade beneath the tree and were buzzing about my face.

"Almost time for what?"

"For Bwana to leave Kirinyaga." I paused. "That is why I sent for you."

"The *mundumugu* wishes me to help him?" said Ndemi, his young face shining with pride.

I nodded.

"I will do anything you say," vowed Ndemi.

"Good. Do you know who makes the oils with which Bwana anoints himself?"

"Old Wambu makes them."

"You must bring me two gourds filled with them."

"I thought only the Maasai anoints himself," said Ndemi.

"Just do as I say. Now, have you a bow?"

"No, but my father does. He has not used it in many years, so he will not mind if I take it."

"I do not want anyone to know you have it."

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Ndemi shrugged and idly drew a pattern in the dirt with his forefinger. "He will blame the young men who follow Bwana."

"And has your father any arrows with sharp tips?"

"No," said Ndemi. "But I can make some."

"I want you to make some this afternoon," I said. "Ten should be enough."

Ndemi drew an arrow in the dirt. "Like so?" he asked.

"A little shorter," I said.

"I can get the feathers for the arrows from the chickens in our *boma,*" he suggested.

I nodded. "That is good."

"Do you want me to shoot an arrow into Bwana?"

"I told you once: the Kikuyu do not kill their fellow men."

"Then what do you want me to do with the arrows?"

"Bring them back here to my *boma* when you have made them," I said. "And bring ten pieces of cloth in which to wrap them."

"And then what?"

"And then we will dip them into the poison I have been making."

He frowned. "But you do not wish me to shoot an arrow into Bwana?" He paused. "What shall I shoot, then?"

"I will tell you when the time comes," I said. "Now return to the village and do what I have asked you to do."

"Yes, Koriba," he said, running out of my *boma* and down the hill on his strong young legs as a number of guinea fowl, squawking and screeching, moved resentfully out of his path.

It was less than an hour later that Koinnage once again climbed my hill, this time accompanied by Njobe and two other elders, all wearing their tribal robes.

"*Jambo,* Koriba," said Koinnage unhappily.

"*Jambo,*" I replied.

"You told me to come back when I understood why Bwana must leave," said Koinnage. He spat on the ground, and a tiny spider raced away. "I have come."

"And what have you learned?" I asked, raising my hand to shade my eyes from the sun.

He lowered his eyes to the ground, uncomfortable as a child being questioned by his father.

"I have learned that a Utopia is a delicate thing which requires protection from those who would force their will upon it."

"And you, Njobe?" I said. "What have you learned?"

"Our life here was very good," he answered. "And I believed that goodness was its own defense." He sighed deeply. "But it is not."

"Is Kirinyaga worth defending?" I asked.

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"How can you, of all people, ask that?" demanded one of the other two elders.

"The Maasai can bring many machines and much money to Kirinyaga," I said. "He seeks only to improve us, not destroy us."

"It would not be Kirinyaga any longer," said Njobe. "It would be Kenya all over again."

"He has corrupted everything he has touched," said Koinnage, his face contorted with rage and humiliation. "My own son has become one of his followers. No longer does he show respect for his father, or for our women or our traditions. He speaks only of money and guns now, and he worships Bwana as if he were Ngai Himself." He paused. "You must help us, Koriba."

"Yes," added Njobe. "We were wrong not to listen to you."

I stared at each of their worried faces in turn, and finally I nodded.

"I will help you."

"When?"

"Soon."

"*How* soon?" persisted Koinnage, coughing as the wind blew a cloud of dust past his face. "We cannot wait much longer."

"Within a week the Maasai will be gone," I said.

"Within a week?" repeated Koinnage.

"That is my promise." I paused. "But if we are to purify our society, his followers may have to leave with him."

"You cannot take my son from me!" said Koinnage.

"The Maasai has already taken him," I pointed out. "I will have to decide if he will be allowed to return."

"But he is to be the paramount chief when I die."

"That is my price, Koinnage," I said firmly. "You must let me decide what to do with the Maasai's followers." I placed a hand to my heart. "I will make a just decision."

"I do not know," muttered Koinnage.

I shrugged. "Then live with the Maasai."

Koinnage stared intently at the ground, as if the ants and termites could tell him what to do. Finally he sighed.

"It will be as you say," he agreed unhappily.

"How will you rid us of the Maasai?" asked Njobe.

"I am the *mundumugu*," I answered noncommittally, for I wanted no hint of my plan to reach Bwana's ears.

"It will take powerful magic," said Njobe.

"Do you doubt my powers?" I asked.

Njobe would not meet my gaze. "No, but . . . "

"But what?"

"But he is like a god. He will be difficult to destroy."

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"We have room for only one god," I said, "and His name is Ngai."

They returned to the village, and I went back to blending my poison.

While I waited for Ndemi to return, I took a thin piece of wood and carved a tiny hole in it. Then I took a long needle, stuck it lengthwise through the entire length of the wood, and withdrew it.

Finally I placed the wood to my lips and blew into the hole. I could hear no sound, but the cattle in the pasture suddenly raised their heads, and two of my goats began racing frantically in circles. I tried my makeshift whistle twice more, received the same reaction, and finally put it aside.

Ndemi arrived in midafternoon, carrying the oil gourds, his father's ancient bow and ten carefully-crafted arrows. He had been unable to find any metal, but he had carved very sharp points at the end of each. I checked the bowstring, decided that it still had resiliency, and nodded my approval.

Then, very carefully making sure not to let any of the poison come in contact with my flesh, I dipped the head of each arrow into my solution, and wrapped them in the ten pieces of cloth Ndemi had brought.

"It is good," I said. "Now we are ready."

"What must I do, Koriba?" he asked.

"In the old days when we still lived in Kenya, only Europeans were allowed to hunt, and they used to be paid to take other Europeans on safari," I explained. "It was important to these white hunters that their clients killed many animals, for if they were disappointed, they would either not return or would pay a different white hunter to take them on their next safari." I paused. "Because of this, the hunters would sometimes train a pride of lions to come out and be killed."

"How would they do this, Koriba?" asked Ndemi, his eyes wide with wonder.

"The white hunter would send his tracker out ahead of the safari," I said, pouring the oil into six smaller gourds as I spoke. "The tracker would go into the veldt where the lions lived, and kill a wildebeest or a zebra, and slit open its belly, so that the odors wafted in the wind. Then he would blow a whistle. The lions would come, either because of the odors or because they were curious about the strange new sound.

"The tracker would kill another zebra the next day, and blow the whistle again, and the lions would come again. This went on every day until the lions knew that when they heard the whistle, there would be a dead animal waiting for them—and when the tracker had finally trained them to come at the sound of the whistle, he would return to the safari, and lead the hunter and his clients to the veldt where the lions

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dwelt, and then blow the whistle. The lions would run toward the sound, and the hunter's clients would collect their trophies."

I smiled at his delighted reaction, and wondered if anyone left on Earth knew that the Kikuyu had anticipated Pavlov by more than a century.

Then I handed Ndemi the whistle I had carved.

"This is your whistle," I said. "You must not lose it."

"I will place a thong around my neck and tie it to the thong," he said. "I will not lose it."

"If you do," I continued, "I will surely die a terrible death."

"You can trust me, *mundumugu*."

"I know I can." I picked up the arrows and handed them carefully to him. "These are yours," I said. "You must be very careful with them. If you cut your skin on them, or press them against a wound, you will almost certainly die, and not all of my powers will be able to save you."

"I understand," he said, taking the arrows gingerly and setting them on the ground next to his bow.

"Good," I said. "Do you know the forest that is half a mile from the house Bwana has built by the river?"

"Yes, Koriba."

"Each day I want you to go there and slay a grasseater with one of your poisoned arrows. Do not try to kill the buffalo, because he is too dangerous—but you may kill any other grasseater. Once it is dead, pour all the oil from one of these six gourds onto it."

"And then shall I blow the whistle for the hyenas?" he asked.

"Then you will climb a nearby tree, and only when you are safe in its branches are you to blow the whistle," I said. "They will come—slowly the first day, more rapidly the second and third, and almost instantly by the fourth. You will sit in the tree for a long time after they have eaten and gone, and then you will climb down and return to your *boma*."

"I will do as you ask, Koriba," he said. "But I do not see how this will make Bwana leave Kirinyaga."

"That is because you are not yet a *mundumugu*," I replied with a smile. "But I am not yet through instructing you."

"What else must I do?"

"I have one final task to set before you," I continued. "Just before sunrise on the seventh day, you will leave your *boma* and kill a seventh animal."

"I only have six gourds of oil," he pointed out.

"You will not need any on the seventh day. They will come simply because you whistle." I paused to make sure he was following my every word. "As I say, you will kill a grasseater before sunrise, but this time you will not spread oil on him, and you will not blow your whistle immediately. You will climb a tree that affords you a clear view of the

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plains between the woods and the river. At some point you will see me wave my hand *thus*—" I demonstrated a very definite rotating motion with my right hand "—and then you must blow the whistle *immediately*. Do you understand?"

"I understand."

"Good."

"And what you have told me to do will rid Kirinyaga of Bwana forever?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I wish I knew how," persisted Ndemi.

"This much I will tell you," I said. "Being a civilized man, he will expect two things: that I will confront him on my own territory, and that—because I, too, have been educated by the Europeans—that I will use the Europeans' technology to defeat him."

"But you will not do what he expects?"

"No," I said. "He still does not understand that our traditions supply us with everything we need on Kirinyaga. I will confront him on his own battleground, and I will defeat him with the weapons of the Kikuyu and not the Europeans." I paused again. "And now, Ndemi, you must go slay the first of the grasseaters, or it will be dark before you go home, and I do not want you walking across the savannah at night."

He nodded, picked up his whistle and his weapons, and strode off toward the woods by the river.

On the sixth night I walked down to the village, arriving just after dark.

The dancing hadn't started yet, though most of the adults had already gathered. Four young men, including Koinnage's son, tried to block my way, but Bwana was in a generous mood, and he waved them aside.

"Welcome, old man," he said, sitting atop his tall stool. "It has been many days since I have seen you."

"I have been busy."

"Plotting my downfall?" he asked with an amused smile.

"Your downfall was predetermined by Ngai," I replied.

"And what will cause *my* downfall?" he continued, signaling one of his wives—he had five now—to bring him a fresh gourd of *pombe*.

"The fact that you are not a Kikuyu."

"What is so special about the Kikuyu?" he demanded. "They are a tribe of sheep who stole their women from the Wakamba and their cattle and goats from the Luo. Their sacred mountain, from which this world took its name, they stole from the Maasai, for *Kirinyaga* is a Maasai word."

"Is that true, Koriba?" asked one of the younger men.

I nodded. "Yes, it is true. In the language of the Maasai, *kiri* means

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mountain, and *nyaga* means *light.* But while it is a Maasai word, it is the Kikuyu's Mountain of Light, given to us by Ngai."

"It is the Maasai's mountain," said Bwana. "Even its peaks are named after Maasai chieftans."

"There has never been a Maasai on the holy mountain," said old Njobe.

"We owned the mountain first, or it would bear a Kikuyu name," responded Bwana.

"Then the Kikuyu must have slain the Maasai, or driven them away," said Njobe with a sly smile.

This remark angered Bwana, for he threw his gourd of *pombe* at a passing goat, hitting it on the flanks with such power that it bowled the goat over. The animal quickly got to its feet and raced through the village, bleating in terror.

"You are fools!" growled Bwana. "And if indeed the Kikuyu drove the Maasai from the mountain, then I will now redress the balance. I now proclaim myself Laibon of Kirinyaga, and declare that it is no longer a Kikuyu world."

"What is a Laibon?" asked one of the men.

"It is the Maasai word for king," I said.

"How can this not be a Kikuyu world, when everyone except you is a Kikuyu?" Njobe demanded of Bwana.

Bwana pointed at his five young henchmen. "I hereby declare these men to be Maasai."

"You cannot make them Maasai just by calling them Maasai."

Bwana grinned as the flickering firelight cast strange patterns on his sleek, shining body. "I can do anything I want. I am the Laibon."

"Perhaps Koriba has something to say about that," said Koinnage, for he knew that the week was almost up.

Bwana stared at me belligerently. "Well, old man, do you dispute my right to be king?"

"No," I said. "I do not."

"Koriba!" exclaimed Koinnage.

"You cannot mean that!" said Njobe.

"We must be realistic," I said. "Is he not our mightiest hunter?"

Bwana snorted. "I am your *only* hunter."

I turned to Koinnage. "Who else but Bwana could walk naked into the veldt, armed only with a spear, and slay *fisi?*"

Bwana nodded his head. "That is true."

"Of course," I continued, "none of us saw him do it, but I am sure he would not lie to us."

"Do you dispute that I killed *fisi* with a spear?" demanded Bwana heatedly.

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"I do not dispute it," I said earnestly. "I have no doubt that you could do it again whenever you wished."

"That is true, old man," he said, somewhat assuaged.

"In fact," I continued, "perhaps we should celebrate your becoming Laibon with another such hunt—but this time in the daylight, so that your subjects may see for themselves the prowess and courage of their king."

He took another gourd from his youngest wife and stared at me intently. "Why are you saying this, old man? What do you really want?"

"Only what I have said," I replied, spitting on my hands to show my sincerity.

He shook his head. "No," he said. "You are up to some mischief."

I shrugged. "Well, if you would rather not . . . "

"Perhaps he is afraid to," said Njobe.

"I fear nothing!" snapped Bwana.

"Certainly he does not fear *fisi,*" I said. "That much should be evident by now."

"Right," said Bwana, still staring at me.

"Then if he does not fear *fisi,* what *does* he fear about a hunt?" asked Njobe.

"He does not wish to hunt because *I* suggested it," I replied. "He still does not trust me, and that is understandable."

"Why is that understandable?" demanded Bwana. "Do you think I fear your mumbo-jumbo like the other sheep do?"

"I have not said that," I answered.

"You have no magic, old man," he said, getting to his feet. "You have only tricks and threats, and these mean nothing to a Maasai." He paused, and then raised his voice so that everyone could hear him. "I will spend the night in Koinnage's hut, and then I will hunt *fisi* tomorrow morning, in the old way, so that all my subjects can see their Laibon in combat."

"Tomorrow morning?" I repeated.

He glared at me, his Maasai arrogance chiseled in every feature of his lean, handsome face.

"At sunrise."

I awoke early the next morning, as usual, but this time, instead of building a fire and sitting next to it until the chill had vanished from my aged bones, I donned my *kikoi* and walked immediately to the village. All of the men were gathered around Koinnage's *boma,* waiting for Bwana to emerge.

Finally he came out of his hut, his body anointed beneath his red cloak. He seemed clear-eyed despite the vast quantities of *pombe* he had imbibed

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the previous night, and in his right hand he clutched the same spear he had used during his very first hunt on Kirinyaga.

Contemptuous of us all, he looked neither right nor left, but began walking through the village and out onto the savannah toward the river. We fell into step behind him, and our little procession continued until we were perhaps a mile from his house. Then he stopped and held a hand up.

"You will come no farther," he announced, "or your numbers will frighten *fisi* away."

He let his red cloak fall to the ground and stood, naked and glistening, in the morning sunlight.

"Now watch, my sheep, and see how a true king hunts."

He hefted his spear once, to get the feel of it, and then he strode off into the waist-high grass.

Koinnage sidled up to me. "You promised that he would leave today," he whispered.

"So I did."

"He is still here."

"The day is not yet over."

"You're *sure* he will leave?" persisted Koinnage.

"Have I ever lied to my people?" I responded.

"No," he said, stepping back. "No, you have not."

We fell silent again, looking out across the plains. For a long time we could see nothing at all. Then Bwana emerged from a clump of bushes and walked boldly toward a spot about fifty yards ahead of him.

And then the wind shifted and suddenly the air was pierced by the ear-splitting laughter of hyenas as they caught scent of his oiled body. We could see grass swaying as the pack made their way toward Bwana, yelping and cackling as they approached.

For a moment he stood his ground, for he was truly a brave man, but then, when he saw their number and realized that he could kill no more than one of them, he hurled his spear at the nearest hyena and raced to a nearby acacia tree, clambering up it just before the first six hyenas reached its base.

Within another minute there were fifteen full-grown hyenas circling the tree, snarling and laughing at him, and Bwana had no choice but to remain where he was.

"How disappointing," I said at last. "I believed him when he said he was a mighty hunter."

"He is mightier than you, old man," said Koinnage's son.

"Nonsense," I said. "Those are just hyenas around his tree, not demons." I turned to Koinnage's son and his companions. "I thought you were his friends. Why do you not go to help him?"

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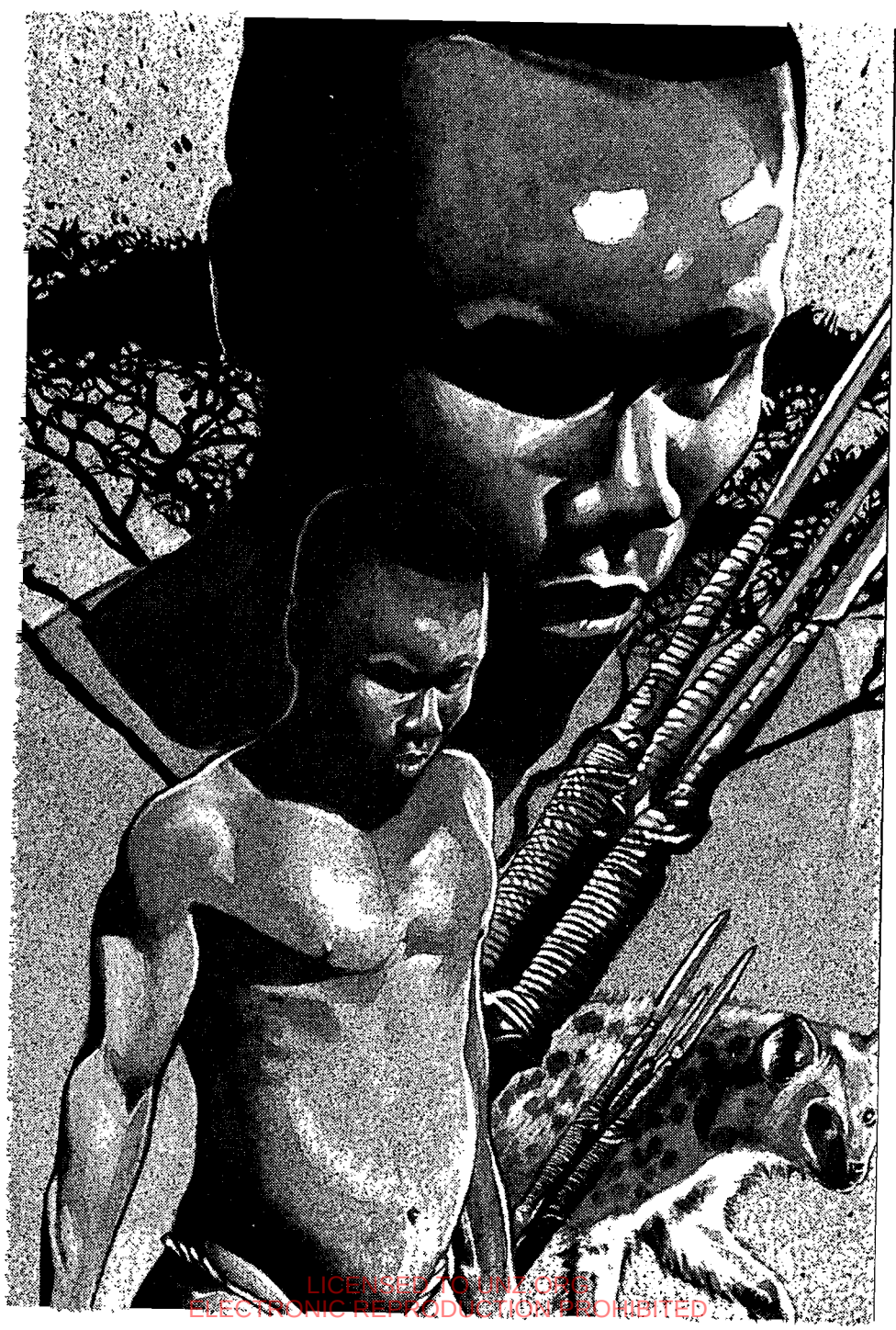

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They shifted uneasily, and then Koinnage's son spoke: "We are unarmed, as you can see."

"What difference does that make?" I said. "You are almost Maasai, and they are just hyenas."

"If they are so harmless, why don't *you* make them go away?" demanded Koinnage's son.

"This is not my hunt," I replied.

"You cannot make them go away, so do not chide us for standing here."

"I can make them go away," I said. "Am I not the *mundumugu*?"

"Then do so!" he challenged me.

I turned to the men of the village. "The son of Koinnage has put a challenge to me. Do you wish me to save the Maasai?"

"No!" they said almost as one.

I turned to the young man. "There you have it."

"You are lucky, old man," he said, a sullen expression on his face. "You could not have done it."

"*You* are the lucky one," I said.

"Why?" he demanded.

"Because you called me old man, rather than *mundumugu* or *mzee*, and I have not punished you." I stared unblinking at him. "But know that should you ever call me old man again, I will turn you into the smallest of rodents and leave you in the field for the jackals to feed upon."

I uttered my statement with such conviction that he suddenly seemed less sure of himself.

"You are bluffing, *mundumugu*," he said at last. "You have no magic."

"You are a foolish young man," I said, "for you have seen my magic work in the past, and you know it will work again in the future."

"Then make the hyenas disperse," he said.

"If I do so, will you and your companions swear fealty to me, and respect the laws and traditions of the Kikuyu?"

He considered my proposition for a long moment, then nodded.

"And the rest of you?" I asked, turning to his companions.

There were mumbled assents.

"Very well," I said. "Your fathers and the village elders will bear witness to your agreement."

I began walking across the plain toward the tree where Bwana sat, glaring down at the hyenas. When I got within perhaps three hundred yards of them they noticed me and began approaching, constantly testing the wind and growling hungrily.

"In the name of Ngai," I intoned, "the *mundumugu* orders you to begone!"

As I finished the sentence, I waved my right arm at them in just the way I had demonstrated to Ndemi.

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I heard no whistle, for it was above the range of human hearing, but instantly the entire pack turned and raced off toward the woods.

I watched them for a moment, then turned back to my people.

"Now go back to the village," I said sternly. "I will tend to Bwana."

They retreated without a word, and I approached the tree from which Bwana had watched the entire pageant. He had climbed down and was waiting for me when I arrived.

"I have saved you with my magic," I said, "but now it is time for you to leave Kirinyaga."

"It was a trick!" he exclaimed. "It was not magic."

"Trick or magic," I said, "what difference does it make? It will happen again, and next time I will not save you."

"Why should I believe you?" he demanded sullenly.

"I have no reason to lie to you," I said. "The next time you go hunting they will attack you again, so many *fisi* that even your European gun cannot kill them all, and I will not be here to save you." I paused. "Leave while you can, Maasai. They will not be back for half an hour. You have time to walk to Haven by then, and I will use my computer to tell Maintenance that you are waiting to be taken back to Earth."

He looked deep into my eyes. "You are telling the truth," he said at last.

"I am."

"How did you do it, old man?" he asked. "I deserve to know that much before I leave."

I paused for a long moment before answering him.

"I am the *mundumugu*," I replied at last, and, turning my back on him, I returned to the village.

We tore his house down that afternoon, and in the evening I called down the rains, which purified Kirinyaga of the last taint of the corruption that had been in our midst.

The next morning I walked down the long, winding path to the village to bless the scarecrows, and the moment I arrived I was surrounded by the children, who asked for a story.

"All right," I said, gathering them in the shade of an acacia tree. "Today I shall tell you the story of the Arrogant Hunter."

"Has it a happy ending?" asked one of the girls.

I looked around the village and saw my people contentedly going about their daily chores, then stared out across the tranquil green plains.

"Yes," I said. "This time it has." ●

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ON BOOKS

by Baird Searles

Mythago Wood Revisited

Lavondyss
By Robert Holdstock
Morrow, $18.95

Lavondyss by Robert Holdstock is a sequel to his highly original award-winning novel, *Mythago Wood*. It too concerns that ancient, mysterious forest in England, one of the rare pieces of woodland in Britain that has been untouched since prehistoric times. It is a mere three square miles in area (though, as it turns out, it's a good deal larger *inside* than it is outside). It is also a terrifying and evil place.

What is *in* the wood? Essentially it is an accumulation of the racial and individual unconscious, made manifest. Quite literally—there are manifestations of everything from ordinary people of the past to mythical characters to totally unhuman powers, coming and going within the wood and sometimes straying beyond its radius. Here is the science fictional element, since we are introduced to peoples of the past, drawn with startling *verismo*. No noble savages these; they are dirty, ignorant, and often dangerously brutal, with a few exceptions. The embodied legends are perhaps even more dangerous, since more powerful; there are bowmen, knights, and horned hunters. We realize, as they are depicted, how prettified and laundered time makes the stuff of legend.

The above is a paraphrase of part of my review of the first book—and I'm afraid it doesn't come near to explaining the psychological, mythical, and anthropological complexities of Mythago Wood. In *Lavondyss*, the central figure is Tallis, an adolescent girl whose brother, an acquaintance of the protagonists of the first novel, had disappeared when she was a child. She grows up near the Wood, under its influence, almost unconsciously learning the all-important names of fields and trees (the naming of names is vital to the process of entering the Wood) and how to create gateways into the various place/times that are there. She eventually is drawn into it to find her brother, whom she is convinced is in the Wood, and to live out her life in its *geistzones*, the forbidden places of the mythic past created by the mythogenetic effects of the Wood.

As you can see, this is not a novel speedily read or absorbed; there are times when it seems as impenetrable as Mythago Wood itself. But the breathtaking play with ideas of time and myth should

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make it worth it for devotees of the first novel and/or the works of Joseph Campbell.

A final note: one aspect of *Lavondyss* I found delightful was the character of an elderly musician, come to Tallis's village to collect old songs. He encourages her to tell her stories and sing her songs, both of which he finds mysteriously intriguing, and comments on her name, which he notes was the name of a fine composer of the past. He says that his name is Williams and also quotes Walt Whitman: "Walk out with me toward the unknown region" (the subtitle of the novel is "Journey to an Unknown Region"). This is obviously meant to be Ralph Vaughan Willams, the great English composer of "Variations on a Theme by Thomas Tallis" and many magical settings of Whitman's works, and probably my favorite of all composers.

Tek Trek

Tekwar
By William Shatner
Ace/Putnam, $18.95

William Shatner's *Tekwar* opens with Jake Cardigan waking from a four-years' sleep—on the Southern California Cryobiotic Penal Institute, orbiting above Greater Los Angeles in 2120. It should have been a fifteen-years' sleep, but for mysterious reasons he has been granted a parole. The sentence was for drug dealing, the drug being *tek*, an electronic brain stimulant using computer chips for input. Jake had been a user, but not a seller; he had also been a cop with the LAPD.

Returning to Los Angeles, he is dragooned by his former police partner, now with a private detective agency, into working on his current case. Apparently Jake, years ago, had been sexually involved with a Mexican guerilla lady who now has taken over the province of Chihuahua. Recently, in that province, there had been a plane crash involving a scientist and his daughter; the Moonbase-Hartford Insurance Co. wants to know if they're dead, and has hired the detective agency to find out. But three operatives sent into Mexico are already missing.

And the quest is on, to Mexico and eventually the Moon—a quest which half the time is a chase with Jake as the quarry. Seems that the scientist was on the verge of a breakthrough which would eliminate tek, and some world-class drug dealers are concerned. And there is the matter of Jake's frameup four years ago, *and* the jealous current lover of the lady guerilla, *and* . . .

The plot is prototypical *film noir* with betrayals, surprises and coincidences; the setting is the currently fashionable *futur noir*, crime- and drug-ridden, and crumbling at the edges. But it's not quite as horrendous as some we've had lately (there's a sort of bouncy insouciance to it, and the good guys actually win), and is very well done in its inventive detail. This future is alive (as it were) with AIs (every

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appliance appears to have one), robots, and androids, some of which are replicates of major characters, which brings a new twist to some of the film noir conventions. And some of the detailing is pretty funny—for instance, the competing Mexican brothels, one of which is advertised as "Movie museum bordello—sleep with any replicas of your favorite stars, past or present" while the other is "Mama Lavida's natural bordello—live hookers only." I liked the aircars that carry spare motors the way cars carry spare tires, and the process of changing one in midair under the direction of a muddled AI.

The author has written plays, but has primarily made his living as an actor on stage, screen, and TV, and has recently made his debut as a film director. This is his first novel. The question will inevitably arise—did he *really* write it? As of the time of this review (some months before the book's publication date), I have no scuttlebutt to the contrary, and will go by what's on the front of the galley. So—not bad for an actor. In fact, pretty damned good for an actor.

Mage Pope

Ars Magica
By Judith Tarr
Bantam, $3.95 (paper)

Judith Tarr's *Ars Magica* is the chronicle of a Pope of the Middle Ages with magical powers. While the story is not without its dramatic content, it's told in a light, skimming style that invites you not to take it too seriously.

This is tenth-century Europe still in the Dark Ages, but struggling to get out. The Byzantines maintain civilization in the East, the Holy Roman Empire aspires to it in the West, where Spain is the country of culture thanks to the Moorish influence. Gerbert, French farm boy become monk, is sent to the Bishop of Barcelona because of his thirst for knowledge. This tolerant Bishop is intimate with both Moors and magic, which in Frankland are both considered of the devil.

Apparently the aptitude and talent for magic is tolerated by the Church secretly, and the more enlightened churchmen even encourage its use. Gerbert has great talent for magic and, overcoming his provincial prejudice against it and infidels, studies with a Moorish mage. His initiation into the power and danger of magic comes when he is tempted by the mage's bronze oracle, a *Jinniyah*, steals it and in the resulting magical firestorm, is unwittingly responsible for the death of the Moor's daughter.

Gerbert goes on to become Secretary to the Archbishop of Rheims, where he becomes involved in the dynastic struggles between the Carolingians and the Capets, and in the process looses a demon which is laid to rest only at great cost. He meets the young Holy Roman Emperor; they take to each other and Gerbert educates Otto in magic. Gerbert is made Bishop of Ravenna

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and discovers there a magical room which from the evidence dates back to the Minoans. He eventually becomes Pope, as Sylvester II.

Tarr's writing is fluid and evocative, and the historical research seems impeccable. Gerbert and his monkish friends are appealing characters, as is the Jinniyah, who plays a rather obscure role in the proceedings throughout. The problem lies in the fact that Gerbert/Sylvester is an historical personage (who was indeed reputed to be magically knowledgeable and about whom associated legends gathered). The author has essentially simply decorated an account of his life with magical happenings (many based on the legends) slipped in between the lines, as it were. Despite the skill with which this is done, the history constrains the fantasy, and the novel will appeal more to the history buff than the fantasy aficionado.

[Light] [Classic]

The [Widget], the [Wadget] and Boff

By Theodore Sturgeon
Tor, $3.50 (paper)

Whenever I set out to reread a reprinted novel by Theodore Sturgeon that I haven't read for a long time, I have a slight sense of dread. This time will I find him old hat, out of date, sentimental and/or cute? And every time I am reseduced by this voice which is unique, more unlike any other SF writer past or present than anyone I can think of.

For one thing, Sturgeon had a talent unusual in mainstream and practically nonexistent in SF, which is to write interestingly about ordinary people, or at least people who start out as ordinary; his characters seldom remain so.

For instance, the human characters in Sturgeon's short novel, *The [Widget], the [Wadget], and Boff*, are a mid-century boarding houseful of average midwestern types: the law clerk, the nightclub hostess with a kid, the librarian, etc. But even in the beginning, before what happens happens, Sturgeon writes about them entertainingly and with flashes of insight that in turn spark flashes of recognition.

This "realistic" matter is interpolated with fairly brief memos from some sort of sentient being to its superiors. It and a companion are on an academic field trip to Earth, studying the incidence of something called "Synapse Beta sub Sixteen" in the human population. (Sturgeon makes the comparison of the aliens' objectivity to a human researcher who occupies himself with the weight gain of amoebae.)

It is in these memos (which are in large part irritable diatribes against the alien's partner) that Sturgeon's comic genius comes into play. In a "translator's note," he says that many of the words used in the memos are untranslatable, and human equivalents are used in brackets. This is not exactly an unknown device, but somehow Sturgeon, with his use of words,

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makes it irresistibly funny, evoking by both what is *not* there and what is, a milieu of totally alien concepts.

For instance: "[I] pointed out further that to supply the necessary stimuli [we] shall have to re[wire] not only the [widget], but that [ ]ed, inefficient, [stone] age excuse for a [mechanism], the [wadget]. [Smith] readily agreed, and while [I] went on arguing [he] began re[wiring], and [I] argued and [he] [wired], and by the time [I]'d [made my point] [he] was practically finished and [I] found [myself] holding the [light] as well . . . In the name of [research] [Smith] would happily [watch] [his] [elderly forebear]'s [knuckles] being [knurled]."

The point of the story is, of course, what the aliens do to the humans, what the humans do to the aliens, and what Synapse Beta sub Sixteen is. And getting [there] is more than [half] the [fun].

(Note: this is one of the upside-down double volumes, such a headache to booksellers and anyone else who wants to keep his/her books in logical order, such a blessing for publishing less than novel-length works. The other side of *this* volume is Isaac Asimov's *The Ugly Little Boy*.)

Double, Double

Double Your Pleasure

By James A. Corrick
Gryphon Books (PO Box 209, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11228-0209), $5.95 (paper)

In these last two columns, I've had occasion to refer to the publishing curiosity known as the double novel, i.e., two short novels published back-to-back and upsidedown, with two "front" covers. The first of these (at least in SF) were the old Ace Doubles, which began in 1953. At that time, the SF *novel*, in the length that we know it, was a rarity; short forms were the rule in the field. As magazines phased out and paperbacks phased in as inexpensive reading matter, and as SF started to grow beyond the small hard core of readers it had had for the first half of the century, the "double" was a good form in which to reprint the novelettes that had first appeared in magazines.

It continued to be popular even when much SF outgrew the form in length, and works were commissioned by the publisher to fit the print, as it were. Many famous authors got their start or a foothold in regular publication in the doubles; John Brunner, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Gordon R. Dickson, Samuel R. Delany were among them. As I've noted above, they were infuriating if you were compulsive about keeping your books alphabetized by author (and doubly so to the bookseller), but a much needed publication outlet for stories that weren't quite long enough to make up a whole book.

The Ace doubles died in the mid-'70s, but not before they became a part of science fiction history and, like so many curiosities, eminently collectable. James A. Corrick, in

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his *Double Your Pleasure: The Ace SF Double*, has done a dandy job of cataloguing all you might want to know about the Ace doubles. Each is listed, with author, cover artist and publishing info for each volume, and the publishing history of each story. There is an historical essay, and an introduction by Donald A. Wollheim, who was responsible for their introduction. And there are b&w reproductions of more than a few covers, guaranteed to inspire an attack of nostalgia in any longtime reader.

(Note—the double form has been revived recently by another publisher—see preceding review. We watch with interest to see if it will succeed in the modern world.)

Shoptalk

Short stories dept. . . . From Bruce Sterling, author of *Islands In the Net*, comes a collection of short stories titled *Crystal Express*. There are five "Shaper/Mechanist" stories, three other SF stories, and four fantasies, and illustrations by Rick Lieder. The author says of the stories: "Shining bits of fractal prose precipitated from the supersaturated solution of the eighties milieu." (Arkham House, $18.95) . . . And a new anthology devoted to a subgenre that I'm always happy to see more of, the alternate history. Edited by Gregory Benford and Martin H. Greenberg, this one is called *What Might Have Been* and is "Volume I: Alternate Empires" which presumably means more on the way. (Stay tuned.) Authors in this one include Kim Stanley Robinson, James P. Hogan, Frederik Pohl, Larry Niven and Benford. (Bantam, $4.50, paper.)

Reprints dept. . . . A little known novel by T. H. White has been republished after long years of neglect. It's *The Elephant and the Kangaroo*, and has to do with a disturbance in the chimney of Mrs. O'Callaghan's cottage (in Ireland, wouldn't you know) which *she* thinks is the Archangel Michael. As it happens, it *is* the Archangel Michael, come to warn of another Flood (Signet, $3.95, paper) . . . Roger Zelazny's *Changeling* and *Madwand* have been republished in one volume under the original title of *Wizard World* (Baen, $3.95, paper) . . . There's a beautiful new edition of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Tree and Leaf* which includes, in addition to the title essay and the story "Leaf By Niggle," a poem, "Mythopoeia" and an introduction by son Christopher Tolkien (Houghton Mifflin, $12.95).

And yet another bit of Oziana, this one a reprint of a rare volume the tattered original of which I have held on to for many years. It's *Who's Who In Oz* by Jack Snow, perhaps the first of all the character-compendium/gazetteer type books now common in SF and fantasy. Jack Snow was a sometime writer for *Weird Tales* who became the fourth author of the Oz series. The *Who's Who* has a listing for every character in the Oz books up through #39 (*Hidden Valley of . . .*), most of them with an illustration

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(and most of *them* by the wonderful John R. Neill). There is also a short plot synopsis for each book, and a map of Oz and its bordering kingdoms (not all that detailed, alas). Now you all know who Dorothy Gale is, but, quick—identify Ann Soforth, Langwidere, and/or Rinkitink. (Peter Bedrick Books, $15.95.)

Sequels, Installments and whatall . . . Cry Republic is the third volume in the alternate history series by Kirk Mitchell which has to do with a world in which the Roman Empire neither declined nor fell. The first two of the series were *Procurator* and *New Barbarians* (Ace, $3.95, paper) . . . Then there's the time travel series by Leo Frankowski in which a hapless twentieth-century Pole is stranded in the thirteenth century and is desperately trying to create an alternate history by keeping the Mongols from invading Poland. The third volume of *this* series is *The Radiant Warrior* (Del Rey, $3.95, paper) . . . *The Long Run* is another of the ambitious sequence of "Tales of the Continuing Time" by Daniel Keyes Moran (Bantam, $3.95, paper) . . . And for Hammer's Slammers fans, a fourth volume in their saga, *Rolling Hot* by David Drake (Baen, $3.95, paper) . . . *White Jenna* is a sequel to Jane Yolen's interesting *Sister Light, Sister Dark* (Tor, $17.95).

After-the-fact dept. . . . Last month the only really negative note that was sounded in my enthusiastic review of Dan Simmons' *Hyperion* was a certain peevishness about the ending. Since then I have found out that there will be a sequel, scheduled for release next year. This is good news, as well as invalidating my complaint. Nowhere in the publisher's material that I received was there a clue as to the book being part of a whole; on the other hand, considering the rarity of single novels these days, I should have guessed. Also of interest to Simmons aficionados is another novel of his recently published, *Phases of Gravity* (Bantam, $4.50, paper).

Small press dept. . . . A short novel by Charles de Lint, *Westlin Wind*, has been published in a limited edition by Axolotl Press (surely the only English-language publisher with a name in [I presume] Nahuatl). It's a companion piece to his *Ascian In Rose* from the same source (Pulphouse Publishing, Box 1227, Eugene OR 97440, cloth $35.00, paper $10.00).

Recent publications from those associated with this magazine include: *The Year's Best Science Fiction: 6th Annual Collection*, edited by Gardner Dozois (St. Martin's Press, $13.95, paper); *The Mammoth Book of Golden Age Science Fiction*, edited by Isaac Asimov, Charles G. Waugh and Martin H. Greenberg (Carroll & Graf, $8.95, paper).

Books to be considered for review in this column should be submitted to Baird Searles, Suite 133, 380 Bleecker St., New York, New York 10014. ●

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——"Old Robots Are the Worst" (p) ..... Oct 129
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Branham, R. V. "The Color of Grass, The Color of Blood" (s) ..... Mid-D 116

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——"Neat Stuff" (a) ..... Apr 14
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Charnas, Suzy McKee "Boobs" (s) ..... Jul 78
Cross, Ronald Anthony "Two Plotting Pods" (s) ..... May 126
——"The Front Page" (s) ..... Nov 124

Dann, Jack "Kaddish" (s) ..... Apr 68
Davidson, Avram "Events Which Took Place a Day Before

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——"Waiting for Willie" (s) .. Oct 64
Daw, Jack "Venus Morning/ Venus Evening Lover" ..... Apr 139
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Devlin "Siamese Twins" (c) ... Jul 17
Dozois, Gardner "3rd Annual Readers' Award Results" (a) ..... Oct 8
Dutcher, Roger "The Woman Walking Behind Einstein/ Einstein Calendar 1987" (p) ..... May 51
——"The Bride" (p) ..... May 67
——"Laser Love" (p) ..... Jul 77
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Ellison, Harlan "The Few, the Proud" (s) ..... Mar 22

Ford, John M. "The Hemstitch Notebooks" (s) ..... Aug 85
Fowler, Karen Joy "Duplicity" (s) ..... Dec 96
Frazier, Robert "The Night Swimmers" (p) ..... Jan 170
——"Referents" (p) ..... Apr 79
——"An Engineer of the Infinite" (p) ..... Jun 15
——"The Soul Potter of Ceti Nine" (p) ..... Aug 13
——"Maria Mitchell Observes the Perseid Shower" (p) . Oct 51
Frazier, Robert and Andrew Joron "Original Rays" (p) .. May 135
Frost, Gregory "Divertimento" (s) ..... Dec 60

Gentle, Mary "The Tarot Dice" (n) ..... Mid-D 50
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Gunn, Eileen "Computer Friendly" (s) ..... Jun 92

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——"How to Write a Science Fiction Short Story, Sort Of" (c) ..... May 190
——"Opposing Views on the Greenhouse Effect" (c) ... Nov 83
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——"Heads of State" (c) ..... Mid-D 27

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——"The Return of the Kangaroo Rex" (n) ..... Oct 66
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Kress, Nancy "The Price of Oranges" (n) ..... Apr 98
——"People Like Us" (s) ..... Sep 92
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Laidlaw, Marc "Kronos" (s) ... May 114
Lee, Tanith "Zelle's Thursday"

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Lindholm, Megan "Silver Lady and the Fortyish Man" (n) Jan 90
——"A Touch of Lavender" (na) ..... Nov 18
Lunan, Duncan "In the Arctic, Out of Time" (n) ..... Jul 20

Mason, Lisa "The Oniomancer" (n) ..... Feb 92
McDevitt, Jack "Leap of Faith" (s) ..... May 93
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——"Remembrance of Things Future" (n) ..... Dec 36
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——"First Encounter" (p) ..... Sep 91
Popkes, Steven "The Egg" (na) ..... Jan 130

Robertson, R. Garcia y "The Wagon God's Wife" (n) .. Dec 76
Robinson, Kim Stanley "Remaking History" (s) ..... Mar 96
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——"Enter a Soldier. Later: Enter Another" (n) ..... Jun 146
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Turtledove, Harry "Departures" (s) ..... Jan 114
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Turzillo, Mary A. "Galileo's Blindness" (p) ..... Jul 65
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Utley, Steven "My Wife" (s) .. Feb 66
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Walker, Sage "Indian Giving" (s) ..... Apr 121
Wallingford, Lee and Carol Deppe "Special Delivery" (s) .... Aug 74
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Watkins, William John "The Difference Between . . ." (p) Mid-D 86
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——"When I See Rigel's Light Sleeting Through the Side of Heinlein Station" (p) .. Mid-D 176
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——"As We Forgive Those Who Trespass Against Us" (s) Sep 100
Whitlock, Dean "Iridescence" (s) ..... Jan 76
Williams, Sheila "Hank Jankus" (a) ..... Apr 13
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Willis, Connie "Time-Out" (na) Jul 130
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Wolfe, Gene "How the Bishop Sailed to Inniskeen" (s) .. Dec 69
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Yolen, Jane "Feast of Souls" (s) ..... Jan 125
——"Nazca Lines" (p) ..... May 63
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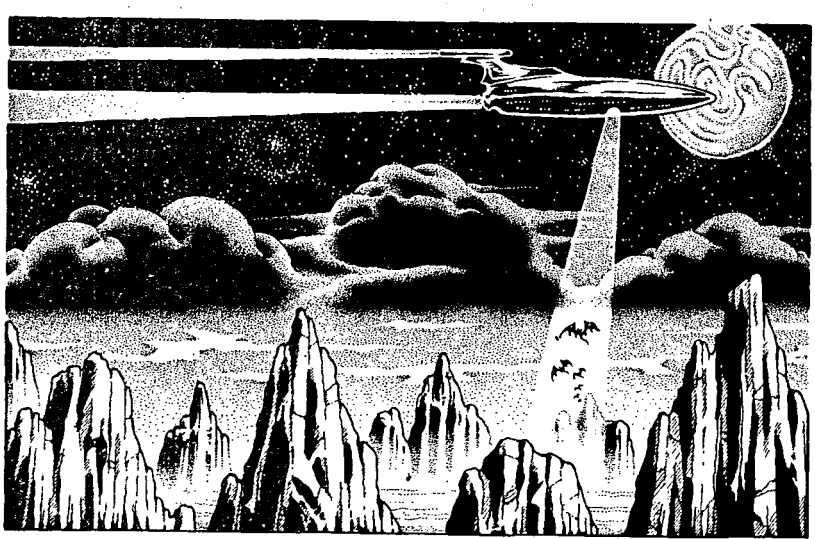

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FOURTH ANNUAL READERS' AWARD

Well, here's our January issue again, which means that another year has come and gone, and it's time for our Fourth Annual Readers' Award poll.

Voting had been heavy in past years, and we hope that everyone who responded last year will vote this year as well.

This is our yearly chance to hear from *you;* that's the whole idea behind this particular award. What were *your* favorite stories from *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* last year? This is your chance to let us know!

Over the years, our readers have never been shy about letting us know, informally, just which stories in the magazine they found to be the most exciting and thought provoking. Now's your chance to let us know formally, by ballot, which stories you thought were the best published in *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* in 1989. This is *your* chance to tell *us* what novella, novelette, short story, poem, cover art, and interior art you liked best last year. Just take a moment to look over the Index of the stories published in last year's issues of *IAsfm* (pp. 184-187) to refresh your memory, and then list below, in the order of your preference, your three favorities in each category. (In the case of the two art awards, please list the *artists* themselves in order of preference, rather than the individual covers or interior illustrations—with the poetry award, however, please remember that you are voting for an individual *poem,* rather than for the collective work of a particular poet that may have appeared in the magazine throughout the year.)

Some further cautions: Only material from 1989-dated issues of *IAsfm* is eligible. And only material that was actually published *in IAsfm* itself is eligible (you may think that this is so elementary that it goes without saying, but you should have seen some of the ballots we've received in the past!). Each reader gets *one* vote, and *only* one vote. If you use a photocopy of the ballot, please be sure to include your name and address; your ballot won't be counted otherwise. Works must also be categorized on the ballot as they appear in the Index. No matter what category *you* think a particular story ought to appear in, we consider the Index to be the ultimate authority in this regard, so be sure to check your ballots against the Index if there is any question about which category is the appropriate one for any particular story. In the past, voters have been careless about this, and have listed stories under the wrong categories—we can only count those ballots whose nominees are categorized correctly according to the Index. All ballots must be postmarked no later than February 2, 1990, and should be addressed to: Readers' Award, Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York NY 10017.

Remember, *you*—the readers— will be the only judges for this award. No juries, no panels of experts. *You* are in charge here, and what *you* say goes. The winners will be announced in an upcoming issue. Vote today.

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BEST NOVELLA:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

BEST NOVELETTE:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

BEST SHORT STORY:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

BEST POEM:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

BEST COVER ARTIST:

1. _____

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3. _____

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NEXT ISSUE

One of the hottest young writers in SF returns to these pages next month, as **Pat Cadigan** serves up our hand-edged and hard-hitting February cover story, "Fool To Believe." Cadigan's "Pretty Boy Crossover," published here in January 1986, has become something of a cult classic, appearing on several critics' lists as among the best stories of the decade, and her "Angel," published here in May 1987, had the rare distinction of being a finalist for the Hugo, the Nebula, *and* the World Fantasy Award. Here she takes us on a gritty, compelling, and oddly evocative tour of the vivid and lushly decadent Underworld of a high-tech future, as Mersine of the Brain Police plunges into the Mean Streets of the Downs in search of mindsuckers, and Cadigan plunges *us* into a maze of faith and illusion, shadow and substance, where nothing is even remotely as it seems. This is a big new novella by a major talent; don't miss it.

ALSO IN FEBRUARY: **Charles Sheffield** returns with a thoughtful and thought-provoking study of the price of progress, in "A Braver Thing": new writer **Damian Kilby** makes an impressive *IAsfm* debut with a brilliant tale of a bittersweet relationship stretched across the jagged edge of time, in "Travelers"; the versatile and chameleonic **Bruce Sterling** returns with a few sly experiments in how to write historical SF—or maybe how *not* to—in the funny and *very* strange (Cast Of Thousands! Special Effects! Famous Guest Stars!) "The Sword of Damocles"; new writer **Deborah Wessell** sweeps us along across a frontier planet as two female adventurers and a hapless alien try to stay a few steps ahead of the Law, in a wild and wooly, high-spirited, high-energy "Joyride"; and Hugo- and World Fantasy Award-winner **Avram Davidson** returns with a short sharp look at an odd way to *see*, in "Seeomancer." Plus an array of columns and features. Look for our February issue on sale on your newsstands on January 9, 1990.

COMING SOON: Big new novellas by **Joe Haldeman** and **Walter Jon Williams.** Plus new stories by **John Crowley, Lisa Goldstein, Kim Stanley Robinson, Steven Gould, Janet Kagan, John Kessel, Kristine Kathryn Rusch, Alexander Jablokov, Sharon N. Farber, Geoffrey A. Landis,** and many others. Subscribe now, and miss none of the year's worth of great *IAsfm* stories coming up in 1990!

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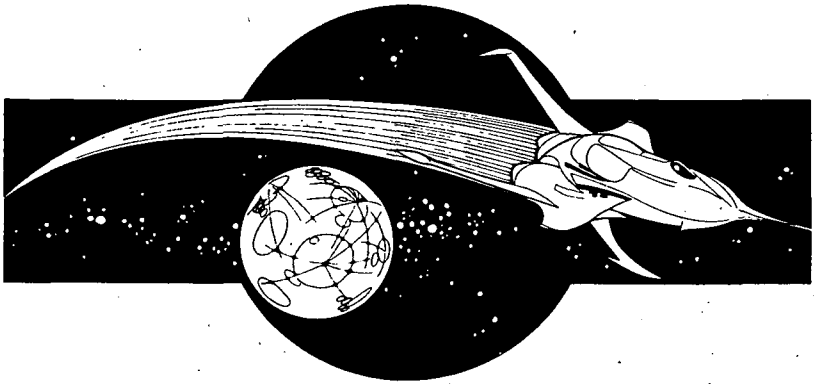

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SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

During the holiday lull, we'll look ahead to next year's con(vention)s. Plan now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists, and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 [business] envelope) at Box 3343, Fairfax VA 22038. Early evening's usually a good time to call cons (most are home phones; identify yourself and your reason for calling right off). When writing cons, enclose an SASE (and again, make it plain just what it is you're asking them about). Look for me at cons behind the Filthy Pierre badge, playing a musical keyboard.

DECEMBER, 1989

29-31—**EveCon.** For info, write: **Box 128, Aberdeen MD 21001.** Or call **(703) 360-2292** (10 am to 10 pm, not collect). Con will be held in: Washington DC (if city omitted, same as in address). A young crowd, heavily into gaming, but still manages to retain a fannish flavor and good SF programming.

JANUARY, 1990

12-14—**ChattaCon, Box 23908, Chattanooga TN 37422. (404) 591-9322.** McDowell, Tucker, Cherry.

12-15—**SerCon, 1647 Willow Pass Rd. #161, Concord CA 94520. (415) 458-9304.** For serious SF fans.

19-21—**RustyCon, Box 84291, Seattle WA 98124. (206) 340-1218.** Ben Bova, Mike Grell, Frank Denton.

FEBRUARY, 1990

2-4—**ConFabulation, Box 443, Bloomington IN 47402.** Christopher Stasheff, the Suttons, John Ford.

2-4—**CzarKon, 1156 Remley Ct., University City MO 63130. (314) 725-6448.** Fenton MO. Adults only.

16-19—**CostumeCon, 3216 Villa Knolls Dr., Pasadena CA 91107.** Ontario CA. Costumers' annual con.

16-18—**Boskone, % NESFA, Box G, MIT PO, Cambridge MA 02139. (617) 625-2311** Springfield MA.

17-19—**EclectiCon, Box 1524, Sacramento CA 95812.** Poul & Karen Anderson, Bob Vardeman, A. Robins.

23-25—**Arisia, Box 2334, Pittsfield MA 01202.** Downtown Boston MA. Richard Bowker, A. C. Farley.

MARCH, 1990

2-4—**ConSonance, Box 29888, Oakland CA 94604. (415) 763-6415.** SF folksinging con, son of BayFilk.

9-11—**WisCon, Box 1624, Madison WI 53701. (608) 233-5640.** Emma Bull, Ian Banks. Feminism & SF.

AUGUST, 1990

23-27—**ConFiction, % Box 1252, BGS, New York NY 10274.** Hague, Holland. WorldCon. $70 in 1989.

30-Sep. 3—**ConDiego, Box 15771, San Diego CA 92115.** North American SF Con. $65 to end of 1989.

AUGUST, 1991

29-Sep. 2—**ChiCon V, Box A3120, Chicago IL 60690.** WorldCon. H. Clement, R. Powers. $75 in '89.

AUGUST, 1992

28-Sep. 1—**MagiCon, Box 621992, Orlando FL 32862. (407) 275-0027.** The 1992 World SF Con. $40. As of this writing, bidding unopposed. The rate shown is only guaranteed to site-selection voters.

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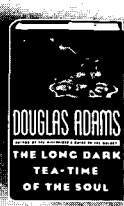

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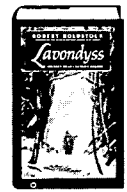

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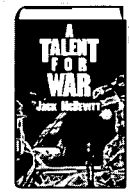

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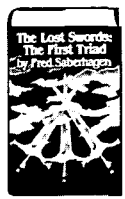

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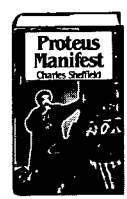

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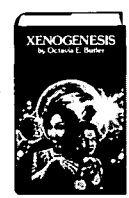

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